

Kingdom of Stars

by gozita444

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Summary: In the middle of a war an unlikely alliance forms between a dangerous man and a frightened young girl. He may be handsome and erotic on the surface but what lurks within is an ancient evil. Will their destination bring them together before their secrets tear them apart? Kazama/OC Hijikata/Chizuru

1. Destination

****Author's note:****

****I have a beta reader 14Phantom, who has proofread and helped edit my work. ****

****The story begins at the last episode in the first season of Hakuoki, or chapter four in kazama's route in the video game for the psp system. Reviews are highly appreciated since this did take a lot of work. I hope you enjoy the story! ****

****Disclaimer: I do not own Hakuoki or its related merchandise, please support the official releases** **of both the anime and the video game.****

****Also I apologize if this chapter seems a bit gruesome, it wont always be that way promise! ****

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><p>~Kingdom of Stars**~

Chapter One: Destination

* * *

><p>January 1868, during the battle of Toba-Fushimi

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><p>"Ah! Let go of me!" I shouted before he stuffed his wormy tongue into my mouth. I struggled to fight back but his arms were too strong.<p>

"Do we have time for this we're in the middle of a war?" grunted a soldier standing behind me.

"It looks like our enemy is retreating to Edo, so we can have some fun with her."

They're retreating to Edo? I thought to myself. I was being attacked by three Satsuma-Choshu alliance soldiers while traveling through the woods alone. "Ah!" I screamed. The man then shoved me onto the ground.

"No! Get ow-th of meh!" I sobbed. His grip on my wrist ached as he restrained me. If only I could get to the knife in my bag; I could defend myself. No even if I did that, these men had guns and, as a young woman, I stand no chance against three strong men.

Then suddenly one of the men shouted.

"What the hell!?"

I heard a sword slash through flesh and blood splattered on the dirt. Suddenly the man on top of me was thrown off and I bolted upright just in time to see a strange shadow figured man stab my attacker in the face, blood oozing out from every angle of the wound. The three Satcho warriors were dead. The man that saved me didn't seem to notice that I was there.

"Uh, thank you." I mumbled quietly. I watched this mysterious shadow figure dig his fingers into the dead soldiers face, peeling his skin off, and started to eat his head. As I stared in horror I staggered to my feet. He had his back to me.

"Hey what are you doing!" I franticly yelled. The man froze when I screamed those words and tilted his head to the side. Had he just acknowledged me?

"Bloooooood!" He slowly turned his head to face me, his lower chin soaked in blood. His eyes were glowing garnet and he had ghostly white hair.

"AHH!" I hollered at the monster before me.

"HeheheHaHaHAHAHHH!" He cackled hysterically as he leaped toward me. I screamed and turned to run, retreating into the dense misty woods. Some of the trees had broken branches that tore my kimono and whipped me. As I stumbled over a sharp rock I could feel my skin peel apart on my ankle. When it looked like I might have lost him, I tripped and fell on the ground. Once I sat up I saw a dozen pairs of glowing red eyes all around me, from every direction. Maybe I shouldn't have embarked on this journey alone, if only I had a companion; someone to protect me. I was so foolish to think I could make it on my own, and now I was going to die!

"Heâ€|hehehe!" Laughter and growls echoed in the woods. They sounded

almost like animals.

I stumbled to my feet wondering which way to go, and once I turned around I came face to face with one of those creatures. Before I could even scream, I saw ten or twenty of them spring out from everywhere. One grabbed my wrist and confined me to the ground. I felt my wrist begin to bruise. As my body hit the dirt the back of my head slammed into a rock.

Everything went silent for a moment, as I gazed up at the burning sun I saw the face of the man I loved, his dark hair was flowing just like the last time I saw him.

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><p>"I'm glad I got to see your face one last time before I died, even if this is just a short dream."

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><p>I told myself as my eyes began to close. Something wet splashed onto my face and made me conscious again. One of the creatures that attacked me was now lying lifeless on top of me. When I sat up I saw limbs flying and heard swords slashing.<p>

"Hmph, damn these filthy creatures, they're going to be a nuisance all the way to Edo." said a tall handsome man. His voice was very deep and erotic. He had blond hair and piercing red eyes and one scratch on his left cheek that seemed to be fading. I was in awe, this man was surely an accomplished swordsman he had killed at least twenty or so men in almost a split second.

"uh youâ€|saved me." I stuttered shyly.

"hn?" He looked over at me, as if he just noticed I was there."

"Thank-"

"Saving you was not my intentâ€|" He cut me off.

"â€|I thought you were already dead." He said as he smeared all the guts off his sword and put it back into its sheath. He turned and started to walk away from me.

"Wait! What were those things!" I hollered, trying to get my shaky body to stand up.

"I see no particular reason for me to tell you." He grumbled annoyed.

"Hold on, you're going to Edo right? You just said they were going to be a nuisance all the way to Edo." I sputtered catching up with him. He stopped and turned his head. "Please, I'm going to Edo as well, could you let me travel with you?"

"I can't have anyone getting in my way." He grunted. I began to get frustrated.

"But-"

"You'll only slow me down, I'm in a hurry."

"Then don't wait up." I mumbled in a mocking tone that only seemed to anger him.

"Don't test me human." He growled.

"So you would just leave a defenseless woman in the middle of the woods!" I taunted holding my arms out.

"Hmph, you are hardly a woman."

"Please! I have no way to defend myself against those monsters, please take me with you! I'm in a hurry as well!" I yelled wild with desperation.

"In that direction there is a safer route. If you go that way it is unlikely that you will get attacked, it will eventually lead you to a road, and you can navigate your way to Edo from there, but going that route will take about twice as long-

"No! If it takes me twice as long then I absolutely cannot go that way! I'm in a hurry, please!"

I heard a slicing sound and felt something cold at the side of my neck.

I gasped when I realized that he had drawn his sword with lightning speed and precision. The blade laid on the right side of my neck. I shivered as a thick warm thread of blood slid down the length of my neck and tickled as it landed on my collar bone. I felt like my body was frozen, I couldn't move at all, and he stared at me, with fury in his crimson eyes.

"This is your only warning, do not get in my way, and do NOT talk BACK to me!" He growled furiously; several long seconds past. I felt my skin rip as he slowly pulled the sword from my neck. A string of blood followed the tip of his blade then splattered onto the floor. A salty tear rolled down my cheek and landed in the corner of my mouth. My whole body was trembling.

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><p>"I'm scared. I'm scared!"

* * *

><p>He was about to turn around and walk away when something caught his attention.<p>

"That thing around your neck, where did you get it from?" He said. I was wearing a medicine bottle with an X mark on it like a necklace around my neck. I was still in shock when he asked me. I clenched my fist trying to get the tears to stop rolling down my cheeks. He had no right to treat me like dirt!

"I..seeâ€|no particular reasonâ€|for meâ€|to tell YOU!" I said staring into his vicious red eyes.

"AHH!" I was slammed into a tree suddenly. He grabbed ahold of my wrist so tight and looked at me with a furious gaze. I whimpered in pain.

Crrracckkk!

"AHHâ€|uhâ€|haaa!" I felt something in my wrist snap and moaned in agony. He just broke my wrist! How could a man do that!

"I thought I warned you not to talk BACK to me, foolish woman." He said leaning his face into mine, I could just barley feel his breath, he was so close. He let go of me and I fell to my knees crying. I gently held onto my broken wrist. He stood over me silent as I writhed in pain. Then I heard him sigh, as if he didn't intend to hurt me this badly.

"Forget it, you probably just bought it as a decoration, you humans, it's all about money with you. And I bet that's why you're in a 'hurry' to get to Edo." He snickered.

"That's not true!"

"Then what is it? What would make a woman travel through such dangerous territory in the middle of a war?"

I sat there at his feet silently copping with the pain.

"Hmph." He began to turn and walk away from me.

"It's becauseâ€|." I shivered when I spoke. I just realized how tense I was. I was trembling so much it was hard to speak.

"I have toâ€|Iâ€|" I felt some of my strength return to me.

"I HAVE TO FIND THE SHINSENGUMI!"

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><p>To Be Continued...

2. Kazama

Arthur's note:

**Thank you so much for the people who reviewed my last chapter I really appreciate it. The title references a major event that happens later in the story, just in case anyone is wondering. **

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><p>"I HAVE TO FIND THE SHINSENGUMI!"<p>

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><p>~Kingdom of Stars~

Chapter two: Kazama

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><p>"Shinsengumi" He growled. Fury flashed in his red eyes when I said the Shinsengumi's name. Could they be enemies?<p>

"Their fake warriors, fighting a hopeless battle they cannot win." He grumbled as he placed his hand on his left cheek where the scratch was. He must be fighting against the Shinsengumi, and if so, that would mean we're enemies! I pulled the knife I had out of my bag and hid it in the front part of my clothes so that I could easily access it.

"Arrrr!" The pain in my wrist was intensifying. I placed my right hand on top of it and tried to snap the bones back in place.

POP

"AH!" It hurt like hell, but after my bones were set in the right place it felt a little better. While he was in deep thought, I ripped a piece of my clothing and tried to use it as a cast for my wrist. This man has so much strength. I've never met someone as strong as he is. I know I am not safe with him and I am truly afraid of this man but I need to get to Edo as soon as possible in order to find the Shinsengumi. It will be nearly impossible for me to defend myself in my weakened state so I have no choice but to follow him and rely on his strength to protect me. He is a dangerous man. I have to leave him as soon as I am able before he kills me. All I have to do for now is follow the rules he gave me. One, I must not mess with or talk back to him, and two, don't slow him down. If I can avoid doing that I know we can form some sort of an alliance, at least enough of one, to reach our destination.

He still had his hand on his cheek, I wondered if someone in the Shinsengumi could have given him that scratch.

>"Huh?" I gasped as he dropped his hand to the side. The scratch had disappeared! This is no ordinary man. I have to be careful around him and try to get on his good side.<p>

"Um, hey?" I said shyly. He looked at me irritated.

"What's your name?"

"Chikage Kazama." He said in his deep handsome voice. Kazama, his name is Kazama. I repeated his name in my mind a few times so I wouldn't forget it. I'm surprised he told me his name; maybe he's not that bad after all.

"So can I-"

"Do as you wish." He cut me off when I was about to ask if I could travel with him. He started walking away from me. I staggered to my feet and followed him. If he really is fighting against the Shinsengumi I cannot tell him anything about him I can't risk putting a loved one in danger. I just hope I can find the Shinsengumi before it's too late.

The entire time we walked I tried to stay close to him. Every now and then I would jump when I heard something, and there was a time when I tripped over a rock and screamed when I hit the ground. Not once did he look back at me. He didn't slow down either and I had to run a little ways to catch up with him after falling. He ignored me

entirely.

"Hey." I called to him. He didn't respond.

>"You haven't asked for my name yet, would you like to know what it is?"<p>

"I couldn't care less what your name is, lowly human." He grumbled.

I pouted behind him and decided it was best for me not to speak to him. Suddenly I heard Kazama draw his sword.

"Damn it!" He growled. I saw a pack of those monsters from before coming straight at us!

"Kazama!" I ran to his side frightened. He turned around and glared at me stopping me in my tracks.

"Foolish woman! They can smell the blood on you and that attracted them here!" He shouted at me in frustration. I held my broken wrist to my chest and backed away from him a few feet.

He started slicing and stabbing them in the chest when they attacked. One of those creatures came at him from his side and his sword slashed through the creature's eyes, blinding it. It wandered around confused and enchanted by the fresh scent of blood.

"Damn these furies, and damn the humans that created them! They should never have tried to gain the powers of an oni, and damn that foolish fake warrior who marred my face!" Kazama roared as he sliced open one of the creature's guts before stabbing it in the chest and kicking it to get his sword back to slash at another one behind him. He called them furies, is that what these things are?

"That human, I will make him pay and suffer for insulting me and the oni!" Kazama slid his sword back in its sheath after killing the ones that blocked his path but the blind fury still wandered around between us. Kazama had his back to me again and was walking away. I was afraid to run to catch up with him with this monster in the way. When I made a run for it the fury leaped at me and pinned me to the ground.

"Ahh! Kazama! Kazama!" All I could do was scream. He bit me on my shoulder.

"Ahhh!" I cried in agony.

"Kazama please, please! Kazama!" I begged, but got no response. I tried to look in the direction Kazama went. All I could see was a blurry image of his back fading in the distance as tears swelled up in my eyes. I knew at that point, if I was going to survive I had to fight for myself! But how do I get this fury off of me!? What attracts them is fresh blood. If I could get his attention elsewhere maybe I could make my escape. I bit my tongue and waited till I had a mouth full of blood and spat it out as far as I could on the grass beside me. The fury turned his head in the direction of the fresh blood on the grass and moved off of me just enough to lick it up. I took that opportunity to slide from underneath the fury and stood up pulled out my knife and stabbed it in the back. It had no effect!

"AHHH!" I gave up and ran as fast as I could after putting my knife away. Kazama that jerk! He really doesn't care if I live or die at all! He probably hates me and wanted that fury to kill me so I would leave him alone. I could hear the fury's growls and footsteps as he chased me. When I saw Kazama I ran into him and hugged him from behind while sobbing into his back.

"Why you filthy-"before he could finish his insult he put his hand on my shoulder and push me on the ground behind him. I landed on my butt. He pulled his sword from its sheath and stabbed the blind fury in the chest in one quick motion.

"If you're going to kill a fury you have to stab it in the heart." He said looking down at me.

"Uhh, thank you!" I stood up and stared at him in the eyes. "Why didn't you kill that-"

"It wasn't in my way." He said aggravated at me. "We're traveling through dangerous war territory if you can't handle yourself then take the safer route I told you about before. Hmph, why even look for the Shinsengumi anyway? They're all pretty much dead."

"Don't say that!" I shouted out of frustration. "The Shinsengumi are desperately fighting for what they believe in; fighting for a fleeting dream that they all share!" I held my broken left wrist to my heart. "You're wrong for calling them fake warriors before! A-an-and your wrong for saying that they're pretty much dead! I will find the Shinsengumi I have to! I HAVE TO!" I covered my mouth. What did I just say to him?

Clink

Kazama used his thumb to pull his sword out of his sheath about an inch and stared at me, malice tainted his crimson red eyes. I took a few steps away from him whimpering in fear. I clenched the medicine bottle around my neck for comfort.

"W-w-wait, uhh, you're not going to...?" I backed away some more. "Sorry, I didn't meanâ€¦"

"You still haven't told me where you got that medicine bottle with the 'X' mark on it from." He said taking a few steps closer to me.

"Someone gave it to me." I shivered when I spoke.

"Who?" He said.

"I'm sorry but I rather not, I-I can'tâ€¦tell you." I stuttered.

"And you expect me to protect you? You think you're entitled to my protection just because you're a woman. What makes you, a lowly human, think that you deserve _my_ protection!?" He growled as he started to walk toward me. "You humans think you're entitled to EVERYTHING!" He said pulling his sword completely out of its sheath. I turned around and ran, ran for my life! He's going to kill me!

I heard a sword slash above my head and saw a branch fall beside me as I ran into the woods to try to elude him.

* * *

><p>"He's going to kill me; he's really going to kill me!"

* * *

><p>When I was deep into the forest, I stopped to take a look around and to my surprise Kazama was nowhere to be seen. Did I out run him for the moment? I decided to try to trick him by using the blood on my clothes and from my wounds to make a blood trail leading in the opposite direction I intended to go. Then I ran a little ways from the trail I made and hid behind a tree and some bushes. I leaned my back against the tree and slowly let my body collapse to the ground. I pulled my knees to my chest and hugged my legs. This is a nightmare! Thinking back, I realized that I had talked back to him when I told him he was wrong about the Shinsengumi and by not handling that blind fury on my own, I had slowed him down. I broke his two rules and now I'm dead.<p>

I suddenly felt his eyes on me from a distance behind where I was hiding. I put my hands on my mouth to keep me from whimpering. He knows where I am. He knows _exactly _where I am! I heard his footsteps, and prepared for the worst. I could never out run this man, or take him on in a fight. It was foolish of me to put my life in his hands to begin with. Wait. His footsteps, as I listened carefully, sounded like they were heading away from me. I heard his sword go back into its sheath. Was he sparing my life?

"Huh!?" When I looked ahead I noticed a road. It's the road! The one that Kazama mention, the safe route for me to take! It was just a little ways off in the distance besides the blood trail I made. I probably should stay hidden for a little while longer before I go for it, just in case Kazama is still planning to kill me.

"Yo, Kazama so this is where you've been, I've been searching for ya." I heard a strange man's voice and peaked behind the tree to see a man with long tied back hair, and a sliver gun in his hand.

"What do you want, Kyo." Kazama said. I could just barley hear them.

"I just came to ask ya, why are you still messing around with these humans? You know it was once strictly forbidden for oni like us to get involved with humans, if it's that girl, I don't see why you won't just take her at this point, and I heard from Amagiri that you had a fight with one of the Shinsengumi members recently." The man Kazama called Kyo said.

"I don't see where any of that is your business." Kazama said growing irritated.

"Well, let me put it this way, the oni clan doesn't like your involvement with the humans, our Satsuma debt has been paid recently, basically if you don't promise to stop messing with those humans you'll lose everything." Kyo said with a sadistic grin on his face. Kazama didn't respond but stared at him intensely.

"I will let you in on a little secret though, you want to know what else Amagiri told me? He said he was actually planning on killing Chizuru to end your interest in the Shinsengumi." Kyo asserted in a provoking tone.

"What!?" Kazama said shocked. Who is Chizuru?

"Yep, but rest assured he has changed his mind since." Kyo crossed his arms. "But, as I see it if killing her would end your interest in these humans then I don't mind doing just that, she doesn't even want you anyway."

SLINGG

Kazama drew his sword with lightning speed.

"Kyo, what did you say!" Kazama growled.

"Hnn." Kyo pointed his gun at Kazama. "So what will it be, Kazama, will you drop your involvement with these humans?"

"Since when was it your place to threaten me, the lord of the oni!?" Kazama roared. Why do they keep on mentioning _oni_? More importantly why do they keep referring to themselves as _oni_? Then Kazama swung his sword at Kyo, who shot at him a few times. Whomever this Chizuru person is she must be really important to Kazama if the mentioning of her death gives him this much rage. I heard some growling noises and footsteps a distance away from me; when I turned to look I saw furies! I caught a glimpse of a whole pack of them licking the blood on the blood trail I had made. I couldn't make it to the road now! All I could do at the moment was sit there and remain hidden. I don't like this Kyo guy he seems dangerous, possibly even more dangerous than Kazama. When I looked back I noticed a change in the two of them as they fought each other. Kazama and kyo's hair turned white and their eyes gold! I also saw horns appear on their foreheads! Maybe they really are oni! That would explain everything!

CLING!

BANG, BANG!

I heard swords slashing followed by gun shots; they were really going at it. Then Kazama sliced Kyo on the arm.

"FOOL! You think you're a match for me!" Kazama protested. Kyo's wound healed instantly!

"Well I admit, Kazama I still haven't told you everything." Kyo said with a smirk on his face. Kazama looked at him puzzled.

BANG!

I saw blood squirt out of Kazama. He was shot!

"AHHH!" Kazama charged at him and every other swing it seemed Kyo got a shot in him. Then Kazama fell to his knees covered in blood.

"Daaaamn it! Why can't I move as quickly as I want to?" Kazama said putting one of his hands on a place where he got shot.

"Huh?" He gasped. "My wounds they aren't healing!"

"HAHAHAH!" Kyo laughed. "So what do you think? Do you like them? They're a special type of bullet used to kill demons like ourselves. Those wounds of yours won't be healing for a while."

"You bastard!" Kazama said as he fell on his side then rolled on his back. His body was jerking from the pain. I saw a puddle of blood beginning to form from underneath him. Then I heard footsteps at a closer distance to me. I turned and noticed the furies were gradually getting closer to where I was hiding, and that I had accidentally left a faint trail of blood leading straight to me! I couldn't stay hidden there for much longer, but at the same time I can't make it to the road with the furies in my way, that and I couldn't just take off and run. If I ran the furies would notice me for sure. What choices did I have? I could risk it and try to make it around the furies, or I could try to help Kazama somehow. I knew if I went toward the road I risked getting eaten and if I went toward Kazama I risked getting shot or sliced to death by either Kyo's gun or Kazama's blade. One thing was for sure, I could not remain where I was.

Kyo raise his gun to Kazama's head. There was no time left! I had to do something! I have to save Kazama! Maybe he would give me a second chance and we could travel together again, I just can't let him die! I stood up from my hiding place and charged toward Kyo.

"Don't!" I shouted as I ran in front of Kazama.

"What do you think your-"said a baffled Kazama.

"Please don't kill him!" I begged.

"AH!" Kyo hit my face with the side of his gun and the force of the impact threw me to the ground a couple of feet away from Kazama.

"What a nuisance, Kazama don't tell me you've befriended this human, you're even more of a disgrace than I thought." Kyo said in a scornful tone.

"I can say the same about you Kyo, threatening to kill a valuable female oni!" Kazama struggled to say.

"Hey for your amusement why won't I just play around with her for a bit?" He said casually walking over to me. I sat up and gave him the fiercest glare I could make.

"Just what are you?" I asked struggling to overcome the pain.

"What you haven't been able to tell, we are the oni, demons in other words." He said walking towards me. Did he just say demons!?

"Psh, you're a mess aren't ya, kimono's all torn, the bright colors stained with dirt and blood; your long black hair as well, absolutely filthy." He said mocking me. As he was getting closer to me, I stood up and ran over to Kazama and put my arms around him. I realize I was doomed, I can't do anything! I started sobbing on his chest for comfort, even if this man hated me and tried to kill me before, he was my only comfort. I had no one else.

"Kazama!" I whimpered.

"Shut up! You mindless lowly being, what do you think you're doing!? Can't you see he's going to kill you!?" Kazama shouted furiously. Suddenly Kyo stood over both of us.

"There, there, it's okay, you don't have to be so afraid, a bullet in the brain doesn't hurt one bit." He knelt down in front of me. I sat up and he leaned his face into mine while grabbing ahold of my chin and staring into my eyes. I wondered if demons were related to furies in any way and then suddenly Kazama's words flashed through my mind.

"_If you're going to kill a fury you have to stab it in the heart."

—

I removed the knife I had hidden in my clothes while Kyo stared into my eyes, enjoying the fear and hatred in them. I pushed my knife right through his chest as hard as I could. His eyes went wide in shock of the unexpected attack. A thread of blood oozed out of the side of his mouth. Then he fell on his side, dead. My vision blurred, I have never killed someone before in my life. I stayed there next to Kazama who seemed to be healing quicker as he rested on the floor beside me.

I sat completely still beside him on my legs with my hands in fists on my lap. I couldn't bring myself to look at him, I was afraid of what he might say or do to me. I struggled to take what just happened all in.

* * *

><p>Kazama is a demon, should I accept that? I never thought the oni existed. I've heard horrific tales as a child about ogres and demons, but none of that is real right? Nightmares aren't real! I find it hard to accept this but if I don't I might as well call my eyes liars. I saw white hair, bright yellow eyes, and even horns! If he really is an oni, that would make it much more dangerous for me to travel with him. Also I never thought the oni were such divine creatures. Kazama's beauty as an oni is absolutely enchanting. If Kazama is the real thing he certainly doesn't fit the description of oni from folklore as beast with scaly skin and monstrous claws. I feel like I'm losing it, Kazama is a monster that tried to kill me, he is an oni, yet I feel bewitched by him somehow.

* * *

><p>I truly felt like I was in some sort of nightmare that only gets worst and worst! I wondered what happened to the furies that I saw back where I was hiding. Since they weren't attracted here by all the noise I assumed they found a source of fresh blood and probably attacked someone. Everything was quiet, the air was completely still. My body was so stiff from my nerves. I couldn't bring myself to say anything. I felt his eyes on me the whole time. I wondered what he could be thinking. Then finally, he spoke.<p>

"Hey, what's your name?"

* * *

><p>To be continuedâ€|

****Author's note:****

****If you've enjoyed this chapter please leave a review so I know to hurry up and post the next one =P****

3. Trust

****Author's note:****

****Thank you, for those who reviewed my last chapter, this chapter wouldn't be here without you and my beta reader l4Phantom, **** I appreciate the support and encouragement, if you enjoy this chapter please leave a review or it may take a while for chapter four to come out =P ****

****Please enjoy, and review!****

* * *

><p>~Kingdom of Stars~

Chapter Three: Trust

* * *

><p>I felt his eyes on me the whole time. I wondered what he could be thinking. Then finally, he spoke.<p>

"Hey, what's your name?"

My eyes went wide and I popped my head up.

"It's Kaori." I mumbled nervously. Kazama stared at me with his crimson red eyes for several long seconds before standing. I gasped. How could he be moving, he was shot at so many times. I noticed a patch of mud was soiled with blood where he had laid. I realized that the oni must be unimaginably strong. Would it be smarter to fear him instead of seeking his aid? There were so many unanswered questions accelerating through my mind, all of which I was too afraid to ask. Still, I couldn't help myself from asking him the obvious. I just had to confirm it. This all seemed too much like a fairy tale.

"Ummâ€|are you really uh?" I sputtered hesitantly in fear of asking him something that would anger him. He seemed irritated at my wavering question.

"What; a demon?" He asserted. I sheepishly nodded my head.

"Don't concern yourself with that. It's none of your business; you just need to get to Edo?"

I nodded, shyly.

"Then I'll take you there, since you did kill Shiranui."

"Really!? You'll let me travel with you!?" I sprang to my feet with a huge smile on my face. He gazed at me for a moment.

"Hmph."

Kazama grunted with slight disgust and started advancing to the woods. I kept myself at a distance behind him cautious of his demeanor. From time to time he would look over his shoulder to catch a glimpse of me. Every time I stumbled or gasped Kazama would look in my direction. He remained silent as we treaded through the sweltering forest. It was uncomfortable not knowing what was on his mind. I really wished he would have shared more information about the oni with me. I was dying to know everything about him. I doubted he would ever open up to me. Most of all I wondered why he hated humans so much, as well as the Shinsengumi.

My wrist began to ache and I held it gently, trying to hold back my moaning. It was still broken and the pain intensified whenever I moved it. I wondered if he even cared about my injury or even cared about me.

But now he was taking me to Edo because he had a debt to pay. Even though I really wanted him to accept me he still seemed disgusted by my presence and that made me feel lonely and unwanted. Still, I was grateful just to be back on my way to Edo where I could find the Shinsengumi. That was my top priority after all.

* * *

><p>I had to find him.

* * *

><p>I wondered what kind of relationship Kazama had with the Shinsengumi , since he acted hostile when I mentioned their name. It would be important to know if we ran into the Shinsengumi together.<p>

"Hey, Kazama."

"What is it?"

"Um, what do you think of the Shinsengumi?" I mumbled, intimidated by his ominous temper. He paused in his tracks to turn and glare at me. Kyo had said Kazama fought one of their members recently, so that must mean Kazama and the Shinsengumi are enemies. I knew we both are on opposite sides of this war but still, I hungered to know what his affiliation is with them.

"What do you mean?" He gave me a cold solemn gaze. He stood in front of me, still as a statue, waiting impatiently for me to respond. I choose my next words carefully.

"Well, what is your relationship with them? Are you really enemies?"

"It would be best for us not to confirm our connection with the Shinsengumi, don't you think?"

I gasped. What was I thinking, Kazama was right. If we confirmed that

we really were enemies that would mean at least one of us would have to die, and by one of us that means me. Besides if we were going to cooperate with each other we shouldn't reveal that we are on opposite sides. For all he knows I could be a spy of some sort. It was obvious we were enemies though, since I defended the Shinsengumi's name, and because he actually fought one of them before.

"You're right, I justâ€¦" I didn't know what I was saying anymore. I yearned to know more about Kazama and the Shinsengumi. What if he's trying to find the Shinsengumi himself? What would that mean for us? Will he eventually just kill me anyway once he fully realizes my connection with the Shinsengumi? I don't understand him at all, and I find it hard to trust him. He began to turn from me.

"Wait, tell me one thing, is that why you're going to Edo, to find the Shinsengumi like me?" I stuttered nervously.

"I already told you we shouldn't discuss it; don't let me catch you mentioning their name again." He growled with his back turned to me. I cautiously scurried over to catch up with him, while still maintaining a distance between us. We traveled a little ways further before Kazama halted suddenly.

"Quiet." He muttered in a harsh whisper. He put his hand on the top of his sword and listened carefully for something.

"Was that you?" He said glaring at me, his crimson eyes wild with disgust. I stared at him puzzled.

"Nuh, no, what's going on, did you hear something?" I whispered.

"Shut up!" He remarked in a furious low voice. Then I heard it, laughter growing in the distance. I gasped and dashed toward Kazama, closing the gap between us. Was it those furies from before? I shivered with fear, wondering if this malevolent man would actually protect me this time. I kept myself about a foot behind him, fighting the urge to cry. Kazama sniffed the air, glanced down at himself then at me.

"Their tracking us like before, it's the scent of blood." He muttered at a low-key. "I know a river by here; we'll head in that direction, and wash the scent off." He took his hand off his sword and waited a moment for a response from me. I was still struggling to keep myself from weeping. I felt like such a useless burden to him.

"Once we get to the river the safer route will be completely out of your reach, you won't be able to turn back if you change your mind."

"No! Whichever way is the fastest to Edo is the route I'm going to take, I can handle myself." I uttered suddenly trying to sound strong. Kazama wasn't fooled he knew just how frightened I was, but it seemed he didn't care. He walked past me and I staggered behind him.

"Foolish woman." He uttered under his breath.

My mind wondered on our way to the river. I couldn't stop thinking about Kyo's words. He said he was going to kill someone named Chizuru

to end Kazama's interest in the Shinsengumi. Perhaps he was looking for that Chizuru person, like how I was trying to find someone. I ached to know, what Kazama had to do with the Shinsengumi and who Chizuru was to him. I had to bite my tongue to prevent myself from impulsively asking him.

When we reached the river Kazama took off his dark coat and began washing the blood off of himself. His clothing looked so rich, I recalled him saying he was lord of the oni to Kyo. Perhaps he really was a lord. As he knelt down toward the water his blond hair gleamed in the blazing sun.

"Head down the river and wash up." He said, before he ignored me completely to get to work. I went far down the river just enough to have some privacy. I felt uncomfortable getting undressed so I just stumbled into the knee high water with my clothes on and washed them quickly, trying to get out before catching a cold. I started to see the bright colors of my kimono appear again after brushing all the dirt off myself. I took the pink ribbon I was wearing out of my raven black hair and washed some of the dirt out of it. My hair hanged down the length of my back. I combed the dirt out of my bangs then styled them to the side. I always had my hair styled in this way. My bangs were short enough that they didn't fall in front of my eyes too much, and I had two thin longer pieces of hair, just past my chin, at the sides of my head that framed my face. When I was done I took the sides of my hair and tied them back with the ribbon in a small bow.

I wondered if Kazama was finished washing himself, but I was too intimidated to check on him. It was starting to get a bit chilly outside. I eventually got bored and began playing in the water, kicking and splashing with my hands and feet.

"Having fun?" He grumbled in a bored tone. I jumped startled and blushing, then peeked over at him. He was sitting down leaning against a tree with his left arm resting on his left knee, his eyes watching me with a calm gaze. He appeared out of nowhere, I wondered how long he was watching me play. I felt so embarrassed.

"Get out of there and dry off for a bit." He said. When I didn't move he gave me a stern glare and spoke to me like I was an idiot.

"Get out of the water."

"Oh! Okay!" I scurried out of the water and plopped down next to him and put my hands in my lap. I looked up at him timidly and he turned his malicious gaze away from me and to the river, trying to ignore my presence. Was I that much of a bother to him?

I gazed off in the other direction and wondered what it would be like to see Kazama smile for once. I imagined him smiling at me and giggled at the thought, knowing how unlikely that is to ever happen. I could feel his hateful eyes on my back but I ignored them myself. It was a huge relief being able to laugh about something after going through a series of horrific events. When I had the courage to peek over at him he had his head leaned against the tree with his eyes closed. Could he be napping? I didn't recognize him at first he looked like a different man entirely with his malevolent eyes closed and without his spiteful glares. His face appeared to be relaxed and his mouth was just slightly open, he looked so peaceful. It was hard

to believe he had devilish horns before, as well as white hair and amber eyes. Those horns' intrigued me the most. I became curious abruptly, and debated whether or not I really did see horns. I leaned my face in closer to his, observing his handsome features.

* * *

><p>I could swear I saw horns before, I know I saw horns.

* * *

><p>Unable to control my strong desire to understand him, I raised my hand to his face and hesitated for a moment before touching his forehead where the horns were. At that instant his crimson eyes sprang open and he caught my hand and spun me around restraining me to the ground, my face in the dirt. He jammed my right arm against my back confining me completely; I couldn't move a single muscle.<p>

"What do you think you were doing?" He growled viciously. I realized it was stupid of me to get close to him, we've been on alert this entire time in the woods, for all he knew I could have been an enemy. I knew he didn't trust me either, and I didn't trust him. My whole body ached his grip was supernaturally strong.

"Rrrhmmâ€|" I mumbled in discomfort unable to speak with my mouth full of dirt. Upon realizing this Kazama turned me over swiftly and pinned his hands around my tiny body imprisoning me underneath him. I held my left wrist to my heart and shivered terrified. I felt tears swell up in my eyes that I was unable to hold back.

"I-I-I.." I whimpered. He glared down at me cruelly.

"Iâ€|sorry." I sobbed as my body recovered from being restrained so firmly. The sun shined brightly behind his angry face and burned my eyes as I struggled to speak. His hateful eyes remained fixated on me impatient for a better response.

"I just, was curious about you, please-"

"Keep your mouth shut lowly human, and don't ever try to touch me again." He said with utter disgust. Cold wet tears were racing down the sides of my face now, I was crying uncontrollably. His hurtful expression frightened me.

"Please let me goâ€|you're scaring me!" I cried, shutting my eyes. "It hurtsâ€|please, I'm scared." I panicked. I felt like the sun grew brighter then peeked my eyes open and noticed that he was off of me now. I sat up slowly regaining my composure. I was still terror stricken by him and turned away unable to look in his direction.

I hate him, I hate him!

I couldn't stand his wicked red eyes or scornful glares. I couldn't bare the aggressive way he treats me. I couldn't take all his hurtful comments or uncaring actions towards me. I couldn't trust him. I couldn't rely on him. I was so afraid of him, it hurt. I would leave him now, if only I knew where I was and if the road to safety was actually in my reach. I was a foolish woman, I should have listened to his warning. Now I was trapped with him, and plagued by my need of

him.

He sat a few feet from me and remained silent as I cried. Once I calmed down I heard him stand and begin to move away from me.

"Well, coming?" He grunted in a low tone. He didn't look at me once. I staggered to my feet and reluctantly followed him like before. It was hard to get tears to stop flowing out of my deep brown eyes. Eventually, I became too tired to cry. The sun was beginning to go down. I could feel a chilly breeze swoop around me. My body was beginning to feel strained as I stumbled with all my might to keep up with Kazama's sturdy stride. I felt hungry, exhausted, and tormented. My legs lost all their strength and I collapsed to the ground. Kazama was a little ways ahead of me and I caught a glimpse of him stopping in his tracks as my eyes closed, I wasn't able to open them again. I laid their lifeless, hoping that Kazama would continue this journey without me, hoping I could finally be free from him, a malicious evil, in death.

* * *

><p>To be Continuedâ€|

4. Strength

****Author's note:****

****Thank you so much for your reviews on my last chapter, I appreciate the suggestions and encouragement from my followers and beta reader 14Phantom. I hope you enjoy this chapter and don't forget to leave a review, they help out a lot.****

* * *

><p>My legs lost all their strength and I collapsed to the ground. Kazama was a little ways ahead of me and I caught a glimpse of him stopping in his tracks as my eyes closed. I wasn't able to open them again. I laid their lifeless, hoping that Kazama would continue this journey without me, hoping I could finally be free from him, a malicious evil, in death.<p>

* * *

><p>~Kingdom of Stars~

Chapter Four: Strength

* * *

><p>In my dreams I saw a graceful little girl dancing around a field of flowers. She was wearing a horrific mask of a devil's face. The mask was pale pink with razor sharp teeth. It had two large horns above two smaller ones by its eye brows. The face wore a beastly malicious expression and its eyes were hollow; empty. It was the frightful face of an oni from common folklore.<p>

She moved aimlessly with elegance in the tall grass. I watched her from a short distance away, baffled by the sight of her. A red ribbon drew the mask to her face and was twisted around her wrist. As she

twirled with the flow of the wind the red ribbon loosely spun around her tiny figure. It appeared as if splattered blood was spiraling around her, under that wicked mask. Then she started to sing in the soft innocent voice of a child.

"Humans are selfish, humans are corrupt; they do not love, they only hate."

I approached her cautiously.

"Hey, little girl?" I called out but got no response. She continued to sing.

"They deserve suffering; they deserve death."

I was alarmed by her devilish song. The words she sung felt like a frightful omen. I wanted her to stop singing those terrible words.

"Hey! Don't say such awful things! What are you doing out here?"

She froze suddenly and those vicious eyes of the oni mask glared at me, a chill running down my spine. Then she fluttered around the field again and began to sing once more but the lyrics changed.

"You are selfish, you are corrupt; you do not love, you only hate. You deserve suffering; you deserve death."

The little girl pointed at me. I grew frustrated and angry.

"Stop singing that!" I yelled.

Then Kazama appeared behind the little girl. He was in his demon form with ghostly white hair and piercing amber eyes. His sharp hellish horns were about a foot long and curved at the tip. His face was tainted with malice as he approached the child.

"Run child, run! Move away from him!" I frantically warned. The little girl did not move. Kazama took his sword and slashed her stomach open. Her blood sprayed out onto the grass. The mask she was wearing fell from her face as she collapsed to her knees. Upon seeing her face I realized; she was me as a child.

"No! Stop, Kazama don't kill her, it's not her fault!" I screeched, but it was too late she was already dead.

"You're right, it should have been me. I'm the one that deserves death." I whimpered. I felt something slimy squeeze out of me and realized that my stomach had been slashed open as well. I reached down, my hands covered in blood and guts. I felt limp, as if my soul had exited my body, and he stood over me with a hateful glare.

"I was the one who should have committed seppuku back then." That last thought of a haunting memory echoed through my mind and brought me to consciousness.

* * *

><p>When I awoke it was almost dark and I was lying on the grass in the same place where I had collapsed; alone.<p>

"Kazama!" I yelled and sprang up. He was nowhere to be seen. Had he left me? I did not know. A part of me was sad at first, and lonely by his disappearance. The other part of me felt relieved. I gripped the medicine bottle around my neck, as I tried to shield myself from the torment of an agonizing memory leaking into my thoughts. I shook my head, pulling myself to together.

"That dreamâ€¦it wasn't real." I whispered to myself. Kazama looked so vicious in that nightmare; it felt so life-like. I placed my hand on my stomach just to make sure it really wasn't slashed open. Then I staggered to my feet.

I had no idea where to find Kazama; I wished I knew where he was. He really did abandoned me. I thought maybe he would wait for me, guess it was foolish to expect that of him. I only knew two things for sure at that point; I was still alive, and I still had to find the Shinsengumi. At that moment I decided with, or without Kazama, I was not going to give up. I needed to see him again, no matter what the cost.

With new found determination I advanced toward the woods and continued my journey, by myself. I feared the worst, remembering why I needed to travel with Kazama in the first place; for protection. What would happen if I ran into more furies? Could I take them on alone? All I had was a knife and I knew that my chance of survival was slim at best. Though it was hard to stand him, I couldn't help missing his presence and feeling a bit destitute.

I heard a strange noise creeping up behind me.

"Kazama?"

I spun around and saw glowing red eyes and sharp menacing fangs a hair away from my face. It was a fury. I screeched and jammed my foot into its gut. It grabbed my ankle and flung it upward, knocking me to fall down hard on the dirt. I pulled out my knife. He sprang on top of me and I stabbed him in the chest. The fury fell to my side and I stood up.

"Heehahahahaha!"

I realized I had just missed its heart. It sprang up facing me while cackling hysterically with my knife still jammed in its chest. It was covered in blood from bullet wounds. I backed away defenseless.

"Kazama!"

Kazama was still nowhere to be seen. The fury leapt at me as I turned to run. It caught me and restrained me to the ground. It was going to eat me.

Sheessh

Suddenly I felt like there was nothing on top of me.

"Kazama?" I whimpered.

When I sat up I noticed I was covered in gray sand and that the fury

and Kazama both were nowhere to be seen. Bewildered over what just happened, I regained my composure and began treading through the woods once more.

After a few steps I heard a voice, and decided to investigate it. I hid behind a tree and saw a girl wealthy dressed with long brown hair.

"So you would agree to become my wife then?" I heard an elegant romantic voice. I peeked around the tree some more and I realized it was Kazama's voice. He grabbed her and lifted her chin up to his face. She looked up at him in disgust.

Slap!

She slapped him on his cheek and glared up at him.

"By all means no, this is strictly business, do not get the wrong idea."

"Damn you." Kazama grunted rubbing his cheek.

"So you will leave Chizuru alone now, yes?"

"Hmph."

"Kazama, I will only agree to bear your child if you promise not to interfere with Chizuru Yukimura's life anymore." She pouted.

She was going to bear his child?

"Alright then, I'll come for you later, oni princess." Kazama agreed.

"Remember Kazama I'm only doing this in service of our oni race."

The branch I was leaning on snapped and I fell forward, landing in front of them. She froze and stared at me.

"Well, hello." She said in a cheerful voice. Kazama growled furiously. I backed away embarrassed to have been caught.

"Um, Kazama I-" I stuttered nervously. The girl gasped.

"Kazama you know this human girl!?"

"Excuse me, I'm sorry." I said, shyly standing up.

"How do you know Kazama?" She persisted.

"Well, he and I were traveling together."

"What!? Really!?" She looked astonished. He glared at me in disgust.

"I didn't mean to interrupt you two."

"Not at all! You can call me Sen, what's your name?" She asked politely.

"I'm Kaori."

"What's this?" She said staring at the medicine bottle on my neck, her eyes grew wide. Suddenly I felt myself being pulled away and realized Kazama had grabbed my right wrist and was dragging me in his direction.

"What are you?"

"Keep your mouth shut." He warned. Then he turned to Sen.

"Be prepared for when I come for you." He demanded.

"You take good care of that girl Kazama, don't harm her." She called out in the distance.

Kazama continued to pull me away from Sen and into the woods. Once we were out of Sen's sight he let go of me and continued walking.

"Wait, Kazama, what were you doing this whole time?"

"Waiting on you, what else?" He said irritated.

"Waiting for me?" I mumbled to myself. "So that girl is really an oni princess?"

"She is none of your concern."

"I know it's not my business but, is Chizuru also an oni then, and that's why you're after her?" I waited for a response. "You're not going to tell me anything, are you?"

"Just keep quiet." He said annoyed.

"Yes, sorry, I'm just really glad that you didn't abandon me, so thank you." I remarked, smiling at him. I cheerfully trotted behind him. He didn't say one word. I wondered how long Kazama and I were going to travel side by side and if we would encounter the Shinsengumi together.

"Hey, Kazama, is Chizuru apart of the Shinsengumi?" I blurted out. Kazama sighed, then turned around and faced me. He raised the back of his hand up across his chest to slap me. I closed my eyes preparing for the impact and felt a small breeze blow through my hair. The back of his hand had stopped right beside my cheek and then fell onto my shoulder. My eyes sprang open.

"I've already told you not to mention their name. This is your last warning, foolish woman." He growled, took his hand off my shoulder, and advanced. I watched him move away from me a few feet then treaded behind him. I kept myself from stupidly asking him anymore questions. I was just so happy I didn't have to be alone, that I just blurted out whatever came to my mind. I felt guilty having to be reminded constantly to keep my mouth shut.

After we traveled a little ways I noticed we had to move along the side of a steep narrow cliff. I moved as cautiously as I could. The side of my foot bumped into a rock and it plummeted down the side of the cliff violently.

"Watch your step." Kazama called out to me.

"Yes, I'm sorry."

* * *

><p>Bang!

Bang!

* * *

><p>Me and Kazama heard what seemed like battle noises echoing in the distance.<p>

"What was that? Is there a battle going on? I thought all of the Shinsengumi retreated to Edo already,"

"Hmph, maybe they didn't make it to Edo and are all being slaughtered." He taunted cruelly. "Such foolish fake warriors, I bet they're all already dead, good riddance."

I grew angry with every word that sputtered out of his mouth. I clenched my fist, holding back the impulse to scream at him. He glared over at me, noticed my struggle, and smirked ruthlessly.

"You should have listened to me before and gave up on them."

"No! Please stop saying that!" I shook worried about the fate of the Shinsengumi. "I have to find them, I have to help them. Please, I beg of you, don't say that they all died, I still have to find _him._" I pleaded.

"So that's it, you're looking for someone in their group, in other words you're with the Shinsengumi." He paused and faced me. "I'm looking for someone with them as well, to fight. I will kill that man, who insulted the oni." He growled.

"You're trying to find the Shinsengumi, to kill one of them!"

"Guess that confirms it then." He said staring at me.

"Huh?"

"We're enemies."

I took a step back from him cautiously. I felt the ground move from underneath me and realized I had lost my footing and slipped over the cliff. I screamed terrified and whaled my arms around. My right hand managed to grab onto a jagged rock as I fell on the side of the cliff. I hung on for my life. I glanced down and noticed sharp rocks at the bottom in the distance. When I tried to climb up on my own my left wrist burned with a sharp paralyzing pain that prevented me from advancing to the top. Each time I made an attempt to use my legs to power my way upward, my feet would slip on the dirt putting more strain on my right hand. My fingers were gradually slipping from the side of the rock. I could see my knuckles turn white from the strain. I wasn't going to last long. I looked up and saw him standing over me. He knelt down on the edge.

"I told you to watch your step, foolish human." He reached his hand down toward me. I peeked down once more, toward the ground, and felt overwhelmed with the sight. My body trembled, engulfed in fear.

"What are you waiting for, you mindless cur, take my hand already!" He growled frustrated.

When I looked up at him, as the sun finally set into night, I envisioned the ghostly white hair, piercing amber eyes, and elongated curved demonic horns. I imagined the malice, tainted in his vicious eyes as he slaughtered the child in my nightmare.

"No!" I screeched. "What happens when I take your hand? You're probably going to just drop me or cut me down once you pull me up." I winced. I fastened myself to the side of the cliff and shut my eyes. Haunting images of that nightmare penetrated my mind and caused me to panic. I couldn't move even if I wanted to, my left wrist was too weak to hold myself up, and I was too afraid to maneuver myself in any direction. I was completely stuck, and my situation seemed hopeless. I heard Kazama sigh.

"Kaori, I won't hurt you."

My eyes popped open at his words, and before I could comprehend what I just heard my body acted impulsively on its own, pushing myself upward to reach him. Those words shocked me, but were enough for me to form my resolve to grab his hand. I took his hand and was pulled up in one swift movement. My body felt light as a feather as I landed back on my feet. Once I was secure, he turned and made his way around the edge of the cliff. I paused for a moment then followed him off the narrow edge of the cliff and back into the woods. My left wrist started to ache. I held onto it, as the throbbing pain slowly evaporated. Kazama was completely silent. All I heard were the rhythmic chirps of crickets in the darkness. We eventually made it to an open patch in the woods.

"We'll rest here for tonight, no sense going on in the dark, can't see a damn thing."

"Um, okay." I nodded my head. He laid down on his side. I wanted to thank him for pulling me to safety but I couldn't find a way to word it and didn't want to risk making him angry or frustrated again. He was probably too tired to care. I sat next to him with my hands in my lap, unable to find the words to thank him. After some time I decided to just flat out tell him how I felt.

"Kazama!" I whispered but got no response. I could hear his faint breathing. It was too late now for me to tell him. He had fallen asleep. I sighed, feeling sleepy myself. I noticed that it might be uncomfortable for him to lie on the ground. I hesitated for a moment then reached my hands out to him and placed his head on my lap. I heard him grunt once in his sleep.

"I'm sorry for foolishly not trusting you before." I spoke softly down to him. He flinched once before regaining consciousness.

"What are you-"He grunted.

"Thank you Kazama, for saving my life."

* * *

><p>To be Continuedâ€|

5. Water of Life

**Author's note: **

Thanks again for all of you who took the time to review my last chapter, please continue to read and review, it means a lot. This chapter is here because of your reviews and my beta reader, 14Phantom, so thank you for the support! =)

* * *

><p>~Kingdom of Stars~

Chapter Five: Water of Life

* * *

><p>I hesitated for a moment then reached my hands out to him and placed his head on my lap. I heard him grunt once in his sleep.<p>

"I'm sorry for foolishly not trusting you before." I spoke softly down to him. He flinched once before regaining consciousness.

"What are you-" He grunted.

"Thank you Kazama, for saving my life."

I spoke softly down to him as he blinked his angry crimson eyes open and gaze up at me, lifting his head from my lap.

"Wait, Kazama, an oni lord should not lay his head in the dirt." I gently placed my hand on his forehead to keep him on my lap. "Please rest on me."

"Hmph." He scoffed. "Then sleep sitting up, foolish woman." He yawned then got comfortable on me and drifted back to sleep. I took my hand off his forehead and tried to remain as still as I possibly could to not disturb him. I leaned my back against a tree behind me and tried to fall asleep. I was very uncomfortable sitting up and my legs grew sore from supporting Kazama's head. I fought the urge to stretch them and remained motionless for Kazama's sake.

* * *

><p>After some time my mind wandered off and in my dreams, I was back on that same cliff crawling my way to the top. All I could remember was the over whelming feeling that if I didn't hurry I would lose someone precious to me. I begged for that person at the top of the cliff to wait for me. I knew the man at my destination was the man I had to see.<p>

* * *

><p>I'll do anything to find you!

* * *

><p>I wondered if I would ever be able to catch up with him. While ascending to the top I shut my eyes from the strain. My last memory was pulling myself over the edge of the cliff to the surface. I never could recall who was waiting for me, if anyone.<p>

* * *

><p>I felt something nudging me on my shoulder. I blinked trying to get my eyes to focus.<p>

"Wake up."

"Hn?" My eyes sprang open to the sound of Kazama's irritated voice.

"How long are you going to make me wait?"

I realized that I was laying on my side, my body outstretched on the dirt. I rotated myself on my back feeling very sore and disorientated. My eyes felt heavy, I rubbed them forcefully as I sat up. It was a struggle to keep the exhausting urge I was feeling, from luring my body back to the ground, to sleep.

"Get up. I won't wait for you any longer."

"Okay!" I staggered to my feet and fell once on my knee, then regained my balanced.

"We're almost out of these filthy woods." Kazama grunted. He started to advance toward a pathway. I brushed the dirt off myself.

"Kazama." I called out.

"What is it?" He grumbled roughly, annoyed.

"Nothing, I just wanna say good morning." I chirped cheerfully. He didn't respond.

"Umâ€|did you sleep well?" I muttered shyly.

"Try to keep quiet human, I'm not in the mood."

"Okay, I'm sorry."

I hoped Kazama slept comfortably on my lap and wondered how long he waited for me to wake up. I gazed up at the vaguely lit sky of dawn and thought about _him,_ the man in the Shinsengumi that I was trying to find. The uncertainty of his wellbeing left me a dark feeling of obscurity. I yearned for the slightest degree of comfort, longing for a sign that this journey will not all be in vain.

As Kazama and I treaded through the woods, I noticed something drifting heavily in the wind. I squinted my eyes and saw a bloodstained blue haori coat in the distance off to the side of the

path we were taking.

"Kazama wait." I uttered sounding more demanding than anticipated. I ran over to the coat and embraced it in my arms.

"This belonged to a member of the Shinsengumi!" I stuttered, exasperated in shock. That was the first sign of the Shinsengumi I had found from the start of this journey but it was given to me in the most unrelenting way. The blood nearly symbolized the death of this coats owner. I could only imagine how the Shinsengumi had suffered from the battle of Toba-Fushimi. Kazama stood behind me.

"Hmph, serves that bastard right. Foolish dogs of the Bakufu didn't know what they were up against." Kazama snickered cruelly. I held onto that coat imagining the worst. He waited a few seconds for a response from me. I gulped back tears maintaining my serenity.

"The Shinsengumi are a waste, they're not even dog samurai." He taunted. "Now drop that repulsive thing or I'll leave you behind." Kazama walked past me without looking back.

"You should consider them all dead." He grumbled, disgusted. I clenched my teeth, gripping tightly onto the bloodily coat.

"You'reâ€¦right." I whimpered. Kazama halted and glanced over his shoulder at me.

"You're right, they probably didn't know what they were up against and they're all probably dead." My arms restrained the coat to my chest, refusing to let go as I stood up. "It was foolish of me to go on this journey to find them, what chance do they possibly have against their enemies?" My voice trembled. Kazamas face was expressionless as he listened to me.

"I-I almost regret my decision to try to find them, but I believe that they keep fighting because of their strong sense of duty and will, and I know they will not give up no matter what the chances of winning or losing are, that's just how he is, stubborn and self-important!" I paused to get a grip on myself, in order not to lose my peace of mind.

"I've gone too far now to give up; I still have to find the Shinsengumi. I made a promise to one of their members that we would meet again, so I have to keep going. Though I can't escape this gut wrenching feeling that it might all be in vain."

"Hmph, looks like you're not as dense as I thought." Kazama mocked. I blinked, puzzled by his words.

"Drop that filthy thing, and let's go." He remarked.

"But-"

"The blood on it could attract furies, leave it, or forget traveling with me." He growled.

I forced my arms to let go and ran over to Kazama, catching up with him. I treaded behind him, my eyes never leaving his back. There was

a chilly breeze in the air, though the sun shined brightly. We traveled peacefully for a while. My stomach grumbled a couple of times. Kazama had ignored me the whole way and traveled through the woods like I wasn't even there. Suddenly Kazama paused in his tracks and scanned over our surroundings.

"Kazama?"

"Come here." He grabbed my arm and shoved me behind some bushes.

"Kazama, what is it?"

"Shut your mouth and stay out of my way, or you'll be killed." He asserted in a serious tone.

"But-" I whispered. He gave me a quick glare that froze the words in my mouth. He took a few steps away from me and extracted his sword from its sheath.

"You've been tracking us for some time now haven't you? Come out you bastard." He called out to the woods. I heard something rattling in the trees, then a dagger flew toward Kazama and he deflected it in one swift movement with his blade.

"Damn you." Kazama growled. I saw him take off hastily away from me. Someone was tracking us? I peeked through the bushes losing sight of Kazama. I wondered where he was going. I didn't want us to get separated and I was worried he would abandon me here. I rushed out of the bushes and ran in the direction Kazama went. Just when I thought I had lost him, I heard a voice and followed it until I saw Kazama, then hid in some nearby bushes.

"I don't understand why you are taking care of that human girl, is it because she wears the legendary Water of Life bottle around her neck, or is it because she saved your life?" The voice belonged to a young boy with brown hair and brown eyes; he seemed to be taunting Kazama.

"What do you know about that?" Kazama growled.

"She was the one who killed Shiranui. Yes? This human girl will have to be punished, you know that."

"Just how long have you been tracking us?"

"Ever since Shiranui found you, by the way were you impressed by his bullets? They were created in the same fashion as that oni slaying sword the Douji-giri Yasutsuna."

"So that explains it." Kazama remarked.

Kazama listened in a ready-to-strike stance. I remained as silent as I could trying not to be noticed by either of them.

"This girl has some kind of connection to the most powerful elixir in history. She will be a valuable asset in the creation of the new oni world, so if you don't mind we'll be taking her." The boy asserted with a barbarous grin on his face as he pulled his sword from its sheath.

I gasped, and quickly put my hands on my mouth. I had no idea what this boy was talking about.

"You're wasting your time." Kazama growled. "This girl is my business. I will decide what happens to her."

* * *

><p>Sling!

Sling!

* * *

><p>Kazama attacked the boy who seemed to be no match for him. Suddenly the boy's hair turned white and his eyes gold. I realized that the young boy was actually an oni. Then I heard some footsteps brushing in the woods near me.<p>

"So this must be the person that Kodo Yukimura wants."

"Looks like it, she wears the generation X Water of Life bottle around her neck."

I heard voices beside me and turned around to see a small pack of furies. I yelped as they grabbed me and pulled me out from the bushes. My arm was scratched on a tree branch as they dragged me.

"Let go of me!" I frantically shouted. "Kazama!"

"BLOOD!" One of the furies started drooling over my arm that was bleeding a bit from the scratch.

"We must not feed on her, Yukimura wants this one alive."

These furies seemed different from the ones I've seen before. They were able to hold onto their sanity in the sight of blood, though it still was a struggle.

"Kazama help!" I screamed as loud as I could. One of the furies put his hand on my mouth and started to carry me off.

"Looks like my business here is done." Said the boy Kazama was fighting. I watched as he started to turn and run from Kazama. The furies were carrying me away in a rush. I lost sight of Kazama and wondered if he went after the boy and decided to forget about me. Then I heard one of the furies screech in pain.

* * *

><p>Sling!

* * *

><p>I saw blood splashing in the air around me. The fury, that was carrying me shoved my body onto the ground and pulled out his sword.<p>

"Hmph, you pitiful fake oni bastard think you stand a chance against me?"

* * *

><p>Slash!

* * *

><p>I sat up to see the pack of furies had been slaughtered and Kazama slicing his sword through the heart of the last remaining fury.<p>

"Kazama!" I said, with glee. Kazama glared spitefully over his shoulder at me in a rage. He grabbed my clothes, lifted me up then slammed me into a nearby tree.

"Tell me everything you know about that Water of Life bottle around your neck." He growled, furious.

"Water of Life? I don't know what you are talking about."

"Don't play dumb with me, human, why do you wear that generation X bottle around your neck?"

"It was a gift to me that's all! I don't know anything about it please believe me!" I cried. He stared into my eyes for several long seconds.

"Kazama, your hurting me, please let go." I begged. He dropped me.

"So, you really know nothing about it, lowly cur." He growled. I shook my head.

"What is the Water of Life?"

"It's a medicine that created these filthy disgusting creatures." Kazama snickered glaring down at the massacred furies.

"So this is a Water of Life bottle?" I questioned while gripping the bottle around my neck. Kazama glanced over at it.

"Don't wear that thing outwardly, conceal it." He remarked. I tucked the bottle in my clothes removing it from sight.

"Did you kill that boy?" I asked.

"Bastard got away, I'll have to find him later and kill him." He said as he sheathed his sword.

"Thank you for rescuing me." I muttered. He glanced over at me with a blank expression. I was so happy that Kazama and I were reunited again and giggled, for some reason I couldn't hold it back. I felt so relieved that Kazama came back to me. His crimson eyes narrowed.

"What's so funny?"

"Oh, nothing; it's just, that was the first time you ever protected

me, I'm beginning to think you're starting to like me a little now, that's all." I mumbled, blushing.

"If you had information about that legendary elixir, I couldn't allow those bastards get their hands on it." Kazama grunted as he began walking down the path. "I can't have you slowing me down anymore, shut your damn mouth, lowly human, and let's go."

"Okay!" I trotted behind him. I felt a little upset knowing that the reason he saved me was to protect information about this mysterious bottle around my neck and not for the value of my own life. I had no idea what kind of secrets it harbored. I only hoped that it wouldn't cause my ruin. We traveled for some time, and he was completely silent as usual. When we made it to the top of a small hill I could see a town in the distance and now we had made it out of the dangerous woods at last.

"Kazama look!" I was so excited that we had made it. I ran over to Kazama's side and pointed to the town.

"I'll be going to Edo by boat." Kazama said. "If you want to stay on land the locals can help guide you, the routes not complicated."

I glanced up at him.

"Kazama, I'll go where ever you will go."

He looked down at me a little irritated.

"Hmph, suit yourself."

* * *

><p>To be Continuedâ€|

* * *

><p>Author's note:

Don't forget to leave a review, they keep me going! Thanks for reading!

6. An Unlikely Alliance

Author's note:

**I really appreciate all the reviews I got last chapter, I read over them before I write each chapter for encouragement. I've decided that I'm going to try to post a new chapter every week around Sunday or Monday, but my schedule changes frequently so if I don't meet that deadline feel free to message me and I'll be able to give you an estimate to when I will be able to post another chapter. **

**Also a word of appreciation to my super amazing beta-reader
14Phantom**

* * *

><p>"I'll be going to Edo by boat." Kazama said. "If you want to stay

on land the locals can help guide you, the routes not complicated."<p>

I glanced up at him.

"Kazama, I'll go where ever you will go."

He looked down at me a little irritated.

"Hmph, suit yourself."

* * *

><p>~Kingdom of Stars~

Chapter Six: An Unlikely Alliance

* * *

><p>"Once we get off the boat, we'll be in Edo right?" I said, ecstatic.<p>

"Yeah." Kazama remarked, in a remote tone. I clasped my hands together with glee, thrilled by the thought of being one step closer to finding _him._

We were making our way through the town. I faithfully followed Kazama, trying to stay as close to him as I could. The streets were very lively and busy.

"I can't believe I'm actually going to make it! I can hardly wait, and it's all because of you." I smiled at his back wondering if he had heard me. "Kazama?" I questioned. He grunted once, ignoring me.

Being so close to accomplishing my goal filled my heart with great festivity. I could barely hold back my excitement.

"I couldn't have made it this far if it wasn't for you, thank you very much!" I chirped, overjoyed. Kazama didn't respond. "Umâ€|Kazama, "

"Hmph, you humans never shut up, do you?" He growled, looking over his shoulder at me.

"Oh! I'm sorry; I don't mean to bother you, I just want you to know how much I-"

"I don't care, so quit pestering me." He grumbled, vexed. I looked down and clamped my mouth shut. The great joy that had accumulated inside of me, evaporated. Kazama's words had struck me hard but they reminded me that there were still a lot of trials ahead, and perhaps it was too soon to celebrate.

It was a chilly day outside, with a few pale clouds in the sky. I was as quiet as I could be, struggling to not be a bother to Kazama. Everyone around us traveled like they were in a rush. I felt a little shaken. I wasn't used to such cantankerous people.

Rrrrrruuppt!

I gasped and placed my hands on my stomach. Kazama turned his head to the side and glanced at me. I blushed, pretending my stomach didn't just growl.

Errrrr-eerrrrruuupt!

It growled again, louder this time. I tried desperately to keep it quiet, but every minute it rumbled. I was so tense this whole time that I didn't realize how famished I was. I heard Kazama sigh. We walked a little ways then Kazama paused in front of a shop and faced me.

"Wait here." He instructed.

"Okay!"

I leaned against a wall, staring at my feet, and waited for him. After a short while he came out of the shop with a tray in his hand that had food on it.

"Here, eat." He ordered, holding the tray out to me.

"Is this really for me?"

Kazama glared down at me like I was an idiot.

"Of course, honestly are you that dense?"

"I'm sorry, thank you very much!"

"If you were hungry why didn't you just say so? Foolish woman, you expect me to do everything?"

I gave him a quick bow then took the tray from him. I lowered myself to the ground and sat on my legs. Kazama leaned against the wall, crossed his arms and watched me eat. I peeked up at him then continued eating. I felt his eyes on me the whole time, it was very nerve-racking. I swallowed a chunk of rice too fast and coughed loudly. I peeked once more at him and he lowered his eyebrows over his annoyed crimson eyes. Each bite I took was difficult. I was uncomfortable eating with him watching my every move. I felt like my throat had closed. I swallowed my food hard and noisily, it was embarrassing. Then I saw Kazama move out of the corner of my eye. My head popped up.

"I'm going to take care of a few things, you finishing eating. Wait for me here." Kazama ordered.

"Okay!"

"Do not move from this spot." He demanded, and then vanished instantly from my sight.

I felt a huge weight lift from my shoulders when he left and I finally was able to relax. I guzzled my food down; I was starving. When I was finished I felt like I could eat more, but was satisfied that my stomach had stopped growling. After throwing away the tray I sat back down; right where Kazama had instructed me not to move from. There were a lot of people rushing by me. I observed many faces I

didn't recognized and swallowed an unrelenting feeling of alienation from the locals. I had no idea who anyone was in this town. I felt helpless sitting there by myself waiting for him to return to me. I leaned my back against the wall behind me and hugged my knees to my chest.

Not knowing a single person in the awfully populated place brought on a devastating feeling of loneliness. I would be completely alone in this journey if it wasn't for Kazama. Though he could be very hard to deal with and a bit antagonistic at times, he still was my companion.

I glanced over in the direction he disappeared from, waiting anxiously for his return. Several long minutes passed and there still was no sign of him. I began to worry. Where could he have gone? Had he abandoned me? I missed him terribly.

"Kazama," I mumbled. I lifted myself up on my feet to get a better look in the distance, but saw no trace of him. I decided to take a few steps in the direction he went to see if I could catch a glimpse of his presence. I wasn't going to wonder far, just to the end of the block. As I walked the medicine bottle that was tucked in my clothes started to irritate my skin, so I took it out briefly.

The Water of Life, generation X, furies, none of this has anything to do with me. This bottle is just an ornament that I wear. I observed it carefully and traced my thumb over the creased X mark in the bottle. At the corner of my eye I saw a man staring at the bottle I held. I pretended not to notice him, and he started to stalk me. I got a little nervous and picked up my pace. When I reached the end of the block he seemed to have disappeared, to my relief.

Suddenly I felt the bottle being snatched from my hand, and the string that held it around my neck snapped. The man who was stalking me had stolen my necklace. I watched as he dashed down the street and into an ally way.

"Hey, give that back!" I called out and rushed after him. When I caught up to him he was alone in the middle of an empty ally way with his mouth on the bottle. It looked like he was trying to drink out of it. We were both completely isolated from the town's population.

"Hey, you! That belongs to me, give it back!" I demanded. I cautiously approached him.

"I must drink it! I must have it! Girl you drank it didn't you? How dare you drink it all! I must have its power! I don't want to turn into sand like the others!" He panicked.

"Turn into sand?"

"Come here girl and let me drink your blood! I must have it!" He growled; his voice in a coarse blustering tone.

"My, blood!?"

He plunged toward me and latched onto my body, hugging me tightly. He tried to force me onto the ground but I fought back.

"Get off of me! Let go! What are you doing? Have you gone mad!?" I screeched, dazzled. His hands gripped my upper arms.

"Please!" He begged. "I don't want to turn into dust!"

"I can't help you! I don't know what you're talking about. I didn't drink anything!"

His hair suddenly turned white, and his eyes a devilish red.

"No! It's begun! Hurry and give it to me!" He cried, desperate. I struggled to hold my ground and stay on my feet but his transformation into a fury had me overpowered. His fangs lunged toward my neck and I swiftly thrashed my body to the side causing him to miss just barely. He clenched his teeth hard on my shoulder and tried to maul through my clothes and into my skin. I squealed in distress. My shoulder burned with throbbing pain.

"KAZAMA!" I screamed at the top of my lungs, wild with terror.
"Kazama! Kazama!"

Then a dark figure dashed beside us and struck the fury, knocking him off of me.

"No! I can't die! Not like this," The fury whined.

'Kazama!?' I cheered, relieved. Kazama stood between me and the fury. He nudged his sword from its sheath with his thumb about an inch and had his right arm outstretched, shielding me from the fury. Kazama studied the fury as he writhed in pain. The furies skin turned gray and Kazama took his hand off his sword and lowered his arm.

"Kazama, why aren't you attacking?" I questioned, confused.

"No!" The fury grieved. I saw ashes leaking from his body; he appeared to be melting. Then the fury hurtled at us. I hollered and Kazama stood completely still.

* * *

><p>Swoooooshhhh

* * *

><p>The furies body disintegrated into sand that gracefully fell at Kazama's feet. I recalled the moment in the woods when I was attacked by a fury that suddenly disappeared. Could this have been what happened to that fury? I ran over to the pale gray sand and dug up the medicine bottle and tucked it away in my clothes. I lifted myself up then looked down, bewildered with thoughts.<p>

"What just happened?" I mumbled, astonished. Kazama was silent. When I glanced up I saw Kazama glaring at me, furiously.

"What were you doing here?" He growled in a crisp, curt, and crude voice.

"Um," I stuttered. "I was worried about where you went, and got impatient." Kazamas eyes narrowed. "It was stupid of me. I shouldn't have left. I'm really sorry. I-"

"Enough." Kazama cut me off, dissatisfied. "I can't stand your foolish excuses, you disobeyed me."

"Yes, I know. I'm very sorry." I muttered with earnest.

"Rescuing a woman who disobeys me is not worth my time. I've already saved your life more than once. I consider my debt to you paid." He chided, then walked passed me to the end of the ally way.

I stood there stricken, feeling too condemned to move.

"Come here." Kazama demanded.

"Okay." I whimpered softly then advanced shyly toward him. We went out of the ally way and into the streets. I watched his back as he guided me through the town. I had no idea where we were going and was too intimidated to say anything for a while. He ignored me entirely. His demeanor toward me hammered me with hurt. After sometime I regained my mental strength.

"Kazama, where are we going?" I uttered in a clear modest tone. He halted at the sound of my voice and turned around.

"This path will lead you to your destination." Kazama said, gesturing to a trail behind him. "It's a safe route, no furies, no soldiers; my business with you is done." He remarked with a blank expression on his face then walked past me. His words left me stunned.

"Kazama, wait!" I called out in a panic. He paused and glanced over his shoulder at me.

"I.." I stuttered feeling nervous. My face felt hot and my vision blurred slightly. "I really want to stay with you. I want us to continue traveling to Edo together." I grieved, brokenhearted. "Please," I mumbled in a soft tearful voice.

"If that's the case, why didn't you do as I instructed?" Kazama scolded, turning his head away from me. "I'm tired of babysitting a woman who doesn't follow directions, you're such a nuisance."

"But!" I blurted out in anguish. I lost my breath and gasped for air then whimpered. Tears formed in my eyes. "Iâ€|hn," I sniffed as a tear rolled down my cheek. My body jerked. It became too much to hold in; I couldn't even speak without bursting into a blubbering fit. I placed my hands on my eyes, hiding my face and the sight of him. I lost the struggle to remain tranquil. I desperately didn't want to be separated from Kazama, to face the cold ominous world alone. I began to weep hysterically. I heard Kazama let out a big sigh.

"Do not disobey me again." Kazama said. My head popped up. Kazama stared at me with a dull expression.

"Do you mean," I sniffed. "I can...?"

"We shouldn't waste any more time, the boat is leaving soon." He turned from me and began advancing down the street. I observed him walking away from me, baffled. I blinked the tears out of my eyes for a couple seconds then my body twitched when the shock wore off. I bolted toward Kazama, catching up with him.

I walked right by his side for once instead of behind him. I glanced up at him and he turned his head slightly to look down at me, irritated, then he picked up his pace. I treaded behind him again, wondering just how much of a burden I really was to him. I felt really grateful that he didn't leave me. I had grown to feel differently about Kazama through our travels. At one time I swore I hated him, but at that moment I never wanted to leave his side, ever.

My neck felt a little sore so I placed my right hand on it and felt a little lump on my skin. I curiously traced the linear lump that was a few inches long, with the tips of my fingers. Then I recalled the moment when me and Kazama first met and remembered when he drew his blade from its sheath with lightning speed, and the cold steel slicing past my neck. I was just then realizing that my encounter with Kazama's sword had left a scar. I was worried about how bad it must have looked. It was a good thing I wore my hair down. Still, being a young woman, realizing this made me feel upset. I wasn't going to hold it against Kazama though. I would be dead without him after all.

We traveled for a while until we reached the docks. I was very excited and anxious to get aboard one of the massive ships. When we approached a ship to board it I backed away intimidated at first. Then I glanced at Kazama and somehow I just knew that everything was going to be okay, because he was there and I wasn't alone. Even though to him I was just a burden, that he couldn't seem to break free from, he was to me, my solace and comfort. I had no idea what to expect from our travels through the vast ocean but we embarked on this new adventure, together.

* * *

><p>To Be Continuedâ€¦|

Author's note:

Thanks for reading and for your continued support, don't forget to leave a review!

7. The Setting Sun

Author's note:

**Whenever I don't feel like writing or continuing the story, I read your reviews and get to work. Thank you so much for those of you who took the time to write a quick review. And thank you 14Phantom for taking the time to be my beta-reader. I hope you all enjoy the next chapter and continue to review and follow the story. **

**Also the image displayed around the time this chapter was posted is my own artwork of Kaori, my OC character in this story (obviously you can tell since she's wearing Kazama's neck thing). I drew it by hand but admit I did look off an image on my lap top as an anchor to position her face. I'm not much of an artist but I figured I'd give her a turn to be displayed, and drew her because there is no other image out there the same way as I envision her. I also used Microsoft Word to edit the image giving it that paint-like look and added the

title. Anyway I hope my readers appreciate it. I don't think I'm going to post original artwork of Kazama since we all already know what he looks like, and this may be the only original artwork of mine that I post, but we'll see on that note. (External link has been posted to my profile page for when the image is not displayed)**

Alright time to get to the story!

* * *

><p>We traveled for a while until we reached the docks. I was very excited and anxious to get aboard one of the massive ships. When we approached a ship to board it I backed away, intimidated at first. Then glanced at Kazama and somehow I just knew that everything was going to be okay, because he was there and I wasn't alone. Even though to him I was just a burden, that he couldn't seem to break free from, he was to me, my solace and comfort. I had no idea what to expect from our travels through the vast ocean but we embarked on this new adventure, together.<p>

* * *

><p>~Kingdom of Stars~

Chapter Seven: The Setting Sun

* * *

><p>Kazama guided me onto a towering ship loaded with civilians. I observed its monumental structure. It had enormous sails, equipped with life boats on the side. I was in awe and accidentally lost my footing while staggering on deck. My body flung forward and Kazama caught me just before my face hit the floor.<p>

"Uh, thank you!" I called out, catching my breath. Kazama lifted me up and my hand grazed over his. I blushed, staring up at him and he scoffed with an annoyed glare in his crimson eyes.

"Don't allow yourself to get distracted, mindless woman." He chided, turning away from me. Kazama was acting very cold towards me since the moment he let me stay with him. I desperately didn't want to be a burden. Though, deep down, I knew I was only deadweight. I resisted the urge to blurt out an apology and silenced myself.

We made our way over to the edge of the boat, isolated from the other passengers. Kazama leaned against the siding of the boat and gazed at the evening sky. We set sail a moment later. I stood beside him, facing the other direction.

"That's a really pretty ribbon!"

I heard a voice of a child and spun around to see a little girl smiling up at me. I touched the pink ribbon that held part of my hair back.

"Thank you," I questioned, not knowing where this child came from.

"Have you seen my grandpa, lady?" She chirped.

"No I haven't,"

"Mio! There you are!" Cheered a wise looking old man who approached us merrily.

"Grandpa!" The girl flung herself into his embrace.

"I told you not to wonder off by yourself." He lectured then faced me. "I'm so sorry. My granddaughter is a very curious girl." He patted her on the head and she giggled.

"Oh! No, it's alright." I remarked in a congenial tone.

Kazama glanced over his shoulder at us and I noticed the old man suddenly looked frightened. He gripped the girl's hand.

"Mio, come! We need to leave now!" He panicked, distressed, glaring at Kazama. "Let's not bother these two again."

Kazama grunted once at them. The old man dragged the young girl from my sight in a hurry as I stood there baffled. I wondered why one look at Kazama caused them to rush away from us. Kazama faced the dimly lit sky again and I sat down beside him. He was completely silent and as still as a statue. I tried to think of something to say to him that wouldn't make him angry.

"Um, it's a nice day, few clouds in the sky." I peeked up at the back of his head. He didn't even budge at the sound of my voice. "I wonder what that guy's problem was." I waited for a response from him, but he continued to ignore me. I sighed and glanced at all the lively people on deck, giving up. Then I saw a man selling dango to passengers. I searched through my wallet and realized I hardly had any money. I had accidentally left the bag I was carrying with me, that contained most of my money, in the woods. I had no idea when Kazama ate last and figured I'd buy him some of that dango to return the kindness he showed me earlier in the streets.

I sprang to my feet, trotted over to the sales man and purchased some of his dango.

"Kazama, here, I bought you some dango." I held the food out to him. "I haven't seen you eat anything, please eat some, it's my treat." I gave him a smile.

"I don't need anything from you." He grunted, annoyed.

"Aren't you hungry? Go ahead, try some." I gestured the dango to him again.

"I thought I just told you I didn't want any, will you quit pestering me?" He growled giving me a nasty look. I slumped down to the floor, sitting on my legs.

"Okay, I'll just leave it here then." I placed the dango on my lap. My stomach rumbled a little. I was starting to feel a bit hungry again. I refused to eat the dango on my lap though, since I got it for Kazama to eat, and I really wanted him to have it. I felt torn apart by his behavior toward me and sighed. I glanced up at the setting sun, remembering the last time I saw him, the man I was

searching for in the Shinsengumi.

* * *

><p>The sun looked just like this the last time I saw youâ€|

* * *

><p>Several long minutes passed and I peeked up at Kazama, wondering what he must be thinking. I noticed he rested his hand on his left cheek. My thoughts went back to that moment in the woods when Kazama spoke of the Shinsengumi and I felt a disturbing feeling of anguish ache in my heart as I recalled his words.<p>

* * *

><p>"Hmph, maybe they didn't make it to Edo and are all being slaughtered." He taunted cruelly. "Such foolish fake warriors, I bet they're all already dead, good riddance."

I grew angry with every word that sputtered out of his mouth. I clenched my fist, holding back the impulse to scream at him. He glared over at me, noticed my struggle, and smirked ruthlessly.

"You should have listened to me before and gave up on them."

_"No! Please stop saying that!" I shook worried about the fate of the Shinsengumi. "I have to find them, I have to help them. Please, I beg of you, don't say that they all died, I still have to find __him.__" I pleaded._

"So that's it, you're looking for someone in their group, in other words you're with the Shinsengumi." He paused and faced me. "I'm looking for someone with them as well, to fight. I will kill that man, who insulted the oni." He growled.

* * *

><p>I was afraid of what I might find in Edo. I feared the man I was searching for this whole time, had already perished. My eyes met the dreary light of the sun as it set beneath the waters of the endless ocean.<p>

"I will find himâ€|" I muttered softly to myself.

"I will kill him."

My head popped up at the sound of Kazama's irritated voice. I feared he was referring to that man in the Shinsengumi. He was still staring at the darkish sky, lost in thought; like I was. I shook the worry out of my head.

* * *

><p>He's still alive I know he is and I'm never going to give up! I'll find you, I swear it!

* * *

><p>I encouraged myself to stay strong. I had no reason to worry about finding him with Kazama traveling with me.<p>

"Um, Kazama, I know this doesn't mean much coming from a clumsy girl like me, but I am grateful for all you've done for my sake, and I won't ever forget the kindness you've shown me, thank you." I stuttered. He tilted his head slightly but didn't respond. I wanted nothing more at that moment than to express my appreciation towards him, though he didn't care to hear any of it.

My stomach grumbled again. I glanced down at Kazama's dango on my lap and decided to just go ahead and eat it myself; not wanting it to go to waste. I had spent what little money I had on it. I felt bad after eating all the dango since I really wanted Kazama to have it. After some time, I noticed some crew members were giving away soup to the passengers. I thought that maybe Kazama just didn't like the taste of dango and that was the real reason why he didn't want any. I left his side and stumbled across the deck to get him some soup. When I made my way back to him, he was sitting down, leaning against the side of the boat. I scurried over to his side and plopped down next to him. I noticed he was resting his eyes and felt too intimidated to disturb him. I waited for several minutes for him to acknowledge me so I could offer him the soup. After a while the soup began to feel cold.

"Hey!" I blurted out, impulsively. I blushed and turned away from him, regretting what I just said. When I glanced back at him his eyes had opened into a glare. He looked at me, disgusted. I gestured the soup to him.

"Please eat." I mumbled, in a low shy voice.

"Hn? You don't think I can take care of myself?" Kazama growled.

"No! That's not it at all. I just," I turned from him, unable to stare into those nauseating garnet eyes in the lightless night. I heard him sigh and felt the bowl of soup swiftly taken out of my hands. I gasped and glanced at Kazama, watching him eat. My dazzled face lit up into a joyful expression. Suddenly Kazama paused.

"Water." He demanded then continued eating.

"Okay!" I sprang to my feet and bolted across the deck searching for water. I returned to him with a jug of it and he drank from it. I sat down next to him with glee and hugged my knees to my chest. Kazama rested beside me for a little while then stood up and gazed at the vast star-lit sky.

"It won't be too much longer now." He grumbled.

"Really!?" I stumbled to my feet with excitement and smiled at him. He continued to gaze into the distance.

"Kazama, I have a questionâ€¦I know you told me not to concern myself with demons but-"

"Then don't bother asking it." He interrupted me.

"But, it's not a very specific question."

"Then go ahead and ask, but whether I listen or not, is a different story."

"Well, why do the oni hate humans so much? What makes them so different that they have to live their lives separately?"

"Throughout history, humans have always used the oni for their own selfish desires. The furies are an example of this." He glanced over at me. "Do you understand?" He questioned and I shook my head. "Humans created them using the blood of demons in order to gain their power." He growled.

"Wait, you remember when that fury attacked me back in that ally way?"

"Yeah, what about it?"

"Why did he turn into sand?"

"It happens to them when their lifespan is up, it's repulsive. They're nothing more than false oni; such revolting fraudulent creatures." Kazama snickered.

"But why would humans want the powers of the oni?" I questioned.

"Simply, for money, war and power; it's all an excuse for gold digging. Humans are endlessly nefarious creatures."

"That's horrible to use the oni in that way." I mumbled, stunned.

"Humans have always used the oni." Kazama remarked, bitterly.

"They were wrong to use them for power. Especially to create those monsters, that's just evil." I uttered. Kazama glared down at me.

"What are you talking about? You're no different."

"Huh?" I gazed into his garnet eyes, shocked.

"Haven't you been using me to get to Edo?" He questioned.

"Well that's, uhâ€¦different," I stuttered. Kazama stared at me, waiting for a better response.

"Foolishness, you humans are all the same."

"But-"

"Enough, I've grown tired of this conversation."

"No! You're wrong." I raised my voice. Kazama gave me a disgusted look. "I don't see how Humans and oni are that different from each other, I believe that they can get along and work together." I began,

he stared at me unimpressed. "Besides, I don't think of you as my enemy at all. I think of you as my friend,"

"Hn," Kazama scoffed. "Well none of that actually matters now, we'll separate once we reach Edo." Kazama said as he turned and walked away from me. I had no clue where he was headed in the ship but I chose not to follow him. I reflected on what he told me about the oni. I wanted Kazama to think of me as his ally and not just any ordinary human.

"We'll soon be in Edo," I mumbled to myself, gazing into the stygian night. In the distance I saw a faint figure floating in the water. I treaded along the side of the ship to get a better look. The figure appeared to be an outline of a ship. I watched as it began to circle around the boat I was on. It didn't carry any flags and mysteriously lurked closer with each turn. Suddenly several crew members started pacing the deck lighting candles. I heard the men call out to the unknown ship, artfully drifting toward us.

BAM!

The ship rocked violently at the sound of a boisterous cannon. I screeched and fell hard on the floor. The civilians aboard the ship started to panic and raced across the deck gathering loved ones and seeking shelter. I stumbled to my feet.

"Kazama!" I shouted. My eyes scanned the area for a glimpse of him. "Kazama! Where are you?" I could barely hear myself shout under the clamorous sounds of naval battle and panicked people. I felt someone latch onto my leg and I glanced down to see that little girl from before hugging me.

"Grandpa!" She cried.

"Oh no, did you get separated again!?"

"Uh huh." She nodded with tears streaming down her face.

"It's okay. I'll help you find him, alright?" I spoke as kindly as I could to her in the mist of the great chaos. Her arms were fastened to my leg and I had to pry her off of me to grab ahold of her hand. I guided the child through the crowd. Then I noticed Kazama advancing toward the side of the ship where he had left me then he searched around the area.

"Kaza-"

BAM!

I saw the waves rise up from the blast of the cannon and engulfed the deck with salty sea water. I kept the girl close to me and lost sight of Kazama. I wondered if he was worried about me. I had to hurry and find the girl's grandfather so I could focus on being reunited with Kazama. I frantically scurried through the crowd and ear-piercing sounds of the attack.

"Grandpa!" The girl cried as she thrashed her hand forcefully out of mine and sprinted toward her grandfather. I scampered after her to make sure they were reunited safely. She hugged him tightly. The elderly man recognized me.

"You're that young lady from before." He said with a shaky voice. "The one with that 'man', don't travel with him. He's dangerous!"

"Grandpa! I'm scared!" The girl bawled. The old man comforted her then glanced up at me. "I know what he is, get away from him while you still can, or things will not end well for you." He warned.

"What do you mean? I have to go, take her to a safe place." I pleaded then dashed away from them in search of Kazama.

"You mustn't follow him!" The old man called out after me.

I stumbled into a crowd of people shielding themselves with barrels, poles, and all sorts of items on the ship. Then I felt something grab me and screamed.

"Hey." Kazama grunted, pulling me toward him.

"Kazama!" I cheered, relieved. He dragged me behind some sturdy barrels that were restrained to the deck with ropes and nails. Then he lowered me to the floor. "What are you-"

"Shut up and stay put." Kazama ordered then stood up and drew his sword swiftly from its sheath.

"Wait! What's going on? Who is attacking us!?" I panicked. Kazama glanced down at me.

"Pirates." He grunted then ventured hastily toward the perilous sounds of battle.

* * *

><p>To Be Continuedâ€|

8. Written in the Stars

****Author's note:****

****Hello everyone. I'm super sorry for the late update! This chapter is a lot longer than my previous ones so I hope that makes up for it. I didn't mean for it to be posted so late though. ****

****Thank you for staying with me through this story! Especially those of you who review all my chapters! I also appreciate your comments about my artwork. That was very nice of you all.****

****Also thank you 14Phantom my beta reader, for sticking with me this whole time :D I hope I continue to improve in your opinion! ****

****Anyway, sorry again for the late update, please enjoy the story and review, review, review, they really help stir excitement and ideas for me!****

* * *

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><p>~Kingdom of Stars~

Chapter Eight: Written in the Stars

* * *

><p>"Pirates!?" I cried, aghast and overwhelmed.<p>

BAM!

My body flung forward into the barrel I was using as cover. My knees slammed onto the deck. I staggered to my feet as the ship shook violently, causing a nauseating feeling inside of my skull. I heard people panic and scurry around the ship. I peeked around the barrel searching for Kazama.

BAM!

BAM!

The impact of the blast, fired from cannons, rocked the boat riotously. My body was thrashed back and forth under the chaos. Suddenly a steel pole flashed in front of my eyes. The impact left a sharp ringing in my ears and heat crept on my face. I fell on my side, holding my head and screaming in agony.

"Kazama!" I cried as loud as I could manage but no matter how loud I called out to him, he didn't come. I stumbled to my feet.

"Kazama!... Kazama!" I whimpered. Everything around me appeared blurred. I held my dizzy head as I swayed back and forth, unable to see the floor. I grazed my fingers over the upper left corner of my forehead and then glanced at them. I was so shaky all I could see was deep garnet oozing liquid dripping down the length of my fingers. I flailed my arms sightlessly around calling Kazama's name. Then my side hit something.

"Kazama?" I questioned. Suddenly I felt like my body was being thrown. Then my limbs were whipped hard on the surface of water.

_Splash! _

I realized that I had blindly staggered to the side of the boat and fallen off. As I sank I saw a string of blood lift from my forehead and disperse in the sea water. The freezing waters numbed my body, making it difficult to move. I could hardly see the surface and could only gaze a few feet in front of me. It was as if I was swimming through murky ink. I caught a glimpse of something lurking in the distance and knew that the great predators of the ocean were attracted to the scent of my blood. It prowled around me, anticipating the perfect moment to strike. My heart raced in my chest as I suffocated. Death was inevitable. My eyes closed as my mind struggled to find peace. My life flashed through my thoughts and paused on my last memory of _him._

The setting sun painted the skies with an orange glow, giving everything shadows. I gazed through teary eyes at his back, his hair flowing. Then he spoke the last words I ever heard him say. Words I could rest in peace with for eternity.

* * *

><p>"Kaori, grow into a beautiful woman someday and marry meâ€| "

* * *

><p>I mouthed the words "I will" to the man in my dreams and my lungs filled with salty sea water. The carnivore beast continued to scavenge around me. I knew that soon the sharks would strike to feast on my flesh, but I didn't fear the feeding frenzy. My soul could survive the infinite emptiness of death with the words he spoke to me that day. If death met I could be at peace with him again, I would embrace it.

I prayed that I would die holding onto that one memory, just so I could be with the man in my dreams in my last moment of life. I forced my mind to continue the memory.

I took a step toward him, then suddenly the sun fell into blackness and I was a beautiful full grown woman. I reached out to him in the dark and he lifted me into his arms, delivering me into his embrace. I felt myself rise as if his spirit was carrying my soul out of my body. I raised my hand, visionless, searching for his face. The tips of my fingers fell on his lips and I gracefully traced the side of his face and rested my hand on his cheek. Then a light shined through my eye lids and, all of a sudden, something didn't feel right.

* * *

><p>I blinked, bewildered. Then I realized that my hand wasn't resting on the cheek of the man in my dreams, but Kazama's. I heard thunder in my head as everything became distorted around me. I painfully regained consciousness. My body shivered violently. Kazama's strong arms held me to his chest. My hand dropped from his face. I saw his lips mouth words I couldn't understand. I was in too much shock to hear anything.<p>

"Ka-Ack!" I began coughing forcefully. Kazama knelt down on the deck of the ship and lowered me gently on the floor. He had saved my life again. I coughed the water out of my lungs. Kazama glanced down at me and said something I couldn't hear, then stood up and rushed away from me.

"No!" I yelled, reaching out. I felt a blanket being placed on me. My head jerked to the side and I saw two civilians helping me recover. I noticed people running around aiding each other. The attack seemed to be almost over. Blood soaked the deck as well as broken parts of the ship. All the corpses on board had slashes cut into them. I knew that Kazama had been the one who killed all the pirates. After some time the shock wore off and I was able to comprehend what was going on around me.

"Are you alright?" Asked one of the passengers, who had put the blanket on me.

"Yeah," I muttered, freezing. My forehead had stopped bleeding. The wound wasn't as bad as I anticipated. When I lifted my hand to touch it I whimpered in pain. The people around me helped me stand. I glanced around at all the passengers who were whispering to each other.

"He killed every last one of them."

"How is that possible? I never dreamed a man could be so skilled."

"He saved us, but he looks so strange, there's definitely something off about him."

My eyes met Kazama's crimson glare through the crowd of chattering people. He stood halfway across the deck from me. The way he looked at me was the same as the very first time I saw him. When he saved me that day, I thought I was going to die and I had envisioned the man in my dreams that I was searching for.

Just a moment ago same thing happened. I saw the man in my dreams awaiting death and Kazama woke me up again from that same dream. Kazama waited there for me. I took a step toward him.

"DEMON!" A man shouted amidst the crowd, I halted at the sound of a boisterous voice. I glanced around and noticed that elderly man from before shouting to the crowd. "THAT MAN IS A DEMON!"

I saw Kazama glare at the old man then scoff. The people started mumbling in agreement.

"I knew there was something strange about him, but a

demon?"

"There's no other way to explain this."

"Everyone stay back!" The old man continued. "No good can come from demons, they are vile, destructive, beasts. It was his presence that poisoned our luck causing those pirates to attack us! Don't be fooled, shun him!"

"He killed all the pirates by himself! He is a monster!" I heard a woman on board shout. The women concealed their children in their arms and the men glared at Kazama like they were threatened by him.

"Be gone with you demon, leave!" The old man yelled, waving his arm toward Kazama. The passengers chattering turned into malicious whispers. Kazama went over to the side of the ship and prepared a life boat then called out to me.

"Hey, coming?" He held his hand out to me. I stumbled a few steps toward him.

"Don't go! Demons and humans don't belong together, they're of different worlds! Stay with us, you are nothing but a human girl, only misfortune falls before those who travel with oni!" The elderly man shouted. I stood before Kazama, reached out to his hand and hesitated, looking over my shoulder at all the flustered people.

"Trust me girl, humans and demons are too different from one another. You won't find what you're looking for with this man." He warned, in a prophetic tone. I glanced back at him. Then I felt myself being pulled and lifted into the life boat in one swift movement. Kazama stepped in with me then slashed the ropes holding the boat to the ship. The life boat hastily splashed onto the surface of the water. The passengers raced to the side of the ship looking down at us. Kazama rowed the life boat away from them. As the old man preached about the danger of demons the people prattled cruelly about us. Some taunted us from the ship.

I felt rage build up inside of me. How could they say such things about Kazama after he saved them? I thought about how ungrateful and selfish the people on that ship were. I felt I understood a reason why Kazama hated humans so much and why he called them nefarious creatures before.

So many things were rushing through my mind. Most of all I was puzzled on how Kazama felt. I wanted to know why he didn't attack the passengers aboard the ship the moment they insulted him but was too intimidated to ask. He sat across from me guiding the boat in the pitch black aphotic night. I stared down at my lap. I could feel a thick ice between us and knew that he was boiling with rage over what just transpired. I wondered if being called a monster hurt his pride. I knew he was proud of his oni blood. I thought of ways to comfort him but gave up. After all how could I a foolish human, ever comfort a proud, intelligent and otherworldly man like Kazama? Knowing him, he probably would feel insulted if I tried to ease his anxieties.

For some time the darkness echoed with cries of hate from the ship we

deserted. Once the distance grew too much to hear them, I realized it was just me and Kazama alone in the middle of the immeasurable ocean.

Kazama steered the boat, looking away from me. I felt I had to say something to him. I wondered how he knew where he we were going and when we would arrive in Edo. But asking a question like that wouldn't be the best way to break the ice between us. We hadn't spoken a word to each other since we left the ship. I clenched my fist and my teeth pressed together to keep myself from saying anything and turned my head to the side, unable to look at him. I felt his garnet eyes on me the moment I turned my head away from him. It must have been the first time he looked at me since we left the ship.

"What's wrong?" He chided, irritated.

"Uh! Nothing!" I stuttered.

"Then don't make that face." He growled, disgusted.

I had no idea how to express my thanks to him for saving my life again, without making him angry.

"You..." I blurted out. He glared at me through narrow eyes. I immediately regretted what I just said. He was steering us to safety and I didn't even call him by his name. I felt like such an idiot.

"Hn?" He grunted, impatiently.

"Kazama," I shyly mumbled.

"What? Is this not good enough for you? Would you rather be aboard that ship with all those filthy humans?"

"Ah! No, that's not it at all," I froze gazing into those angry precarious eyes. All I wanted was to let Kazama know that he wasn't a monster at all but it seemed I only provoked him unintentionally.

"Then what is it?" He grunted, abruptly. I couldn't think of anything to say. He scoffed. "Stupid human,"

"Then why did you take me with you!" I shouted out of frustration.

"You lowly cur, I told you I would take you to Edo, you've been nothing but a burden to me. If you rather swim, go right ahead. Good riddance." He remarked, bitterly. My heart sank. What did I just say!? I had known this whole time he was upset with how those people treated him. All I wanted to do was take his anger away.

"How do you know where we are going?" I uttered, bluntly. He spitefully glared at me and opened his mouth about to say something I presumed injurious toward me but I didn't give him the space to speak.

"You've been navigating this entire time in the dark. It's phenomenal Kazama! How are you doing it?" I stuttered as enthusiastic as I could manage. His expression lightened a bit.

"The stars, of course," He asserted.

"The stars?" I questioned, blinking at him.

"Yes, look up." He gazed at the sky. I glanced upward and gasped. There were thousands of them, all shining brightly yet from such a great distance away. It made me feel so small and inferior. The open universe was breathtaking. At that moment I felt so insignificant compared to the stars substantial supremacy of the skies.

"But there's so many how could you?" I mumbled in awe. Kazama pointed upward.

"You see that big one? I've been using it to-"

"Where?" I questioned, puzzled, scanning the night sky.

"That one next to the smaller ones, no look more to the right." Kazama instructed.

"That one?" I pointed blindly at a star. Kazama shook his head.

"No, you're off a little." He sighed. "Come here." He gestured to me to sit beside him. I moved over to his side and he motioned his arm beside my face, pointing at a luminous star with enticing beauty.

"Oh! I think I see it! It's that one, right?" I directed my finger toward a bright star glimmering in the heavens.

"Yeah, that's the one." Kazama asserted. We were sitting so close I could just barely feel his breath. He went on with his explanation about how the pattern of stars, were like a map that he could use to navigate with. I started yawning, feeling drowsy.

"Are you listening?" He questioned after some time. Truthfully, I hadn't comprehended a word he was saying, but I nodded my head anyway.

"Hey Kazama, can I ask you a question?"

"What kind of question?"

"Well, back on the ship, why didn't you attack the passengers after they insulted you? I mean I thought you would kill anyone who insulted demons but you didn't harm anyone of the civilians."

"Hmph, killing those lowly swine would have been meaningless. I wouldn't gain anything. Those pathetic humans were no threat to me." He grunted.

"Really? You're a good man Kazama." He didn't pay any attention to the complement I gave him instead he gazed at the heavens, steering the boat. I gazed up as well. We were silent again for a while. My ears missed his erotic voice.

My head jerked up and down as I struggled to stay awake. I was surprised that Kazama let me stay next to him. I was thrilled knowing

that soon I would reach my destination. Kazama kept his eyes set on the vast glowing path to Edo, written in the stars. My eyes drifted toward that one sovereign star; its powerful light set it asunder from the rest. It was so radiant that I felt like I was looking at it directly through the eyes of an angel.

"The stars, they're so beautiful." I mumbled.

"They're one thing humans can't destroy." Kazama uttered in his low august voice.

"Or demons." I remarked with a teasing grin on my face.

"Hn, true." Kazama grumbled. I yawned again, admiring the astronomical wonders of the cosmos. Then I closed my eyes and lost consciousness briefly.

* * *

><p>Thump-thumpâ€|thump-thump

* * *

><p>A heartbeat echoed in my ears and I peeked my eyes open realizing that I had drifted off leaning against Kazama's chest. My body jerked up and I felt the back of my head hit Kazama in the face. I gasped when I realized what I had done.<p>

"Kazama! I'm so sorry!" I apologized, embarrassed. Kazama just stared down at me through his narrow crimson eyes. I moved my hand to brush his face and he placed his hand on top of mine, preventing me from touching him.

"It's okay." He said.

"Did I hurt you?" I uttered, worried. Kazama gave me a calm expression I had never seen on him before then he chuckled.

"Hurt me? A human as weak as you?"

That was the first time I ever heard Kazama speak to me in a friendly tone. I felt my face get hot. I glanced at our hands. He placed my hand on my lap and continued steering the boat. I smiled at him, impulsively.

"Hn?" He grunted down at me.

"You're an impressive man, Kazama. Don't pay any attention to what those people aboard the ship said; you're not a monster. What you said before was true, most humans are selfish creatures. Thank you for all that you've done for me tonight, Kazama, thank you for everything." I mumbled losing my breath in a yawn, and then rubbed my eyes.

"Tired, are we?" He remarked and I nodded my head.

"Then go ahead and rest, I'll take care of everything. It won't be much longer now till we reach Edo."

I collapsed into his chest, exhausted. I managed to peek once more at

that one bright star in the sky. I never thought Kazama would ever be kind to me. I had the stars to thank for closing the gap between us. It amazed me how something so distant could bring us so close, together.

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* * *

><p>"Hey."<p>

"Hnn," I grunted in my sleep.

"Wake up, we're in Edo."

"What? Edoâ€|" I mumbled, regaining consciousness. I blinked my eyes open. The life boat was parked by the docks. I was resting on the bench in the boat with Kazama standing over me, it was almost dawn.

"EDO!" I screeched, springing upward. Kazama nodded. I bolted out of the life boat onto a small bridge in the docks. I was ecstatic.

Kazama stood beside me as I took it all in. We advanced off the docks onto land then he paused in his tracks and stared down at me. My heart skipped a beat when I realized what was going to happen next.

I tried to come up with something to say to him before we departed from one another but I felt too stricken to utter a single word. I wanted to smile and tell him how much I appreciated him but for some reason I couldn't form any words in my mouth. I gulped back tears gazing at his handsome deep red eyes.

Kazama waited patiently for me, though I couldn't say it. I couldn't say goodbye, not after all we've been through together.

"Hnâ€|" I whimpered. He held a calm understanding expression. I struggled to maintain my composure. I didn't want my tears to be his last memory of me. I held my breath forcing the blubbering explosion to remain inside of me and he continued to wait.

_Pull yourself together you have to say something to him! After all this time, you have to smile and say goodbye! _

But I couldn't do it! I desperately wanted to throw my arms around him and wish him the best. I wanted to tell him how sorry I was for troubling him and give him thanks for aiding me in my journey. Most of all I wanted him to know how hard parting from him was, that I had grown to admire him so much and revered him as the man who saved my life numerous times.

Despite the great turbulence swelling inside of me, I stood there completely silent, unable to move. Some time elapsed and then I heard Kazama's deep voice ring in my ears.

"Goodbye, Kaori." He finally said disappearing with the flow of the

wind and leaving no trace of himself behind.

* * *

><p>To Be Continuedâ€|

Author's note:

**This chapter was a difficult one to write, please leave a quick review, they do wonders for me! I cherish all my reviewers and followers. Thanks for reading! **

9. The Hungry Wolf

Author's note:

**When I finished this chapter it somehow was almost six thousand words long, when I intended it to be a very short one, so I decided to split it into two parts. I figure, since I've been late recently on my updates, I will post the next chapter within two days from the time this chapter was posted. I have finished the next chapter. All that's left is proof reading it so it will be posted very soon.
**

Also, now we're at a transition phase of the story into the next saga I have planned so I do hope you enjoy the story and continue to read/review. Your support and my beta reader 14Phantom has brought this story this far so I thank you all and look forward to hearing from any of you.

* * *

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><p>~Kingdom of Stars~

Chapter Nine: The Hungry Wolf

* * *

><p>"Goodbye, Kaori." Kazama's voice echoed inside of my head as I gazed, in the direction he vanished from. My heart ached with

devastating affliction from his swift disappearance.<p>

This whole time I felt more than ready to finally arrive in Edo, but nothing could have prepared me for Kazama's goodbye. I had grown to cherish his presence on this lonely journey and was heartbroken that my time with him came to a sudden end.

A riotous wind rustled my hair as I watched the sun rise, giving light to the new day. No matter how bright its rays were, I felt no warmth.

I had missed my only chance to say goodbye and tell Kazama how I felt. Regretfully, I yearned to rewind time to relive that moment, so I could have told him that I wanted us to stay together. I wanted to cry but held my tears inside, knowing that Kazama wasn't crying over our separation. He was glad to be freed from the burden, I was sure of it. I clenched my fist, and formed my resolve to venture the streets of Edo.

"The Shinsengumi," I mumbled to myself, recollecting my thoughts. Even though Edo was my home town I was very unfamiliar with this part of it. My stomach grumbled as I searched for clues of the Shinsengumi's whereabouts.

I asked everyone I could find on the street, though there wasn't many people around at dawn. By the time the afternoon came I felt I had walked around in circles for hours. The rumbling in my stomach refused to cease, and only amplified as time passed. I needed to eat something soon before I collapsed from hunger. I hardly had any money, not enough for a meal. I sighed staring into my wallet which gave me an impoverished conception. I passed a fancy restaurant. Mouthwatering enticing fumes wavered from inside; tempting me with savory delight. Then a chorus of grumbles howled from within my stomach, begging me to indulge myself.

At that moment a notion sparked in my head to eat my fill then skip the bill. I was spectacle at first but gave in to the temptation and treaded inside the elegant restaurant. There were a lot of male workers there, preparing dishes and monitoring the guests. I had to be careful.

A kind waitress greeted me and I requested to be seated by the exit. She gestured the menu to me and I choose their most appetite appeasing meal. When it arrived finally, it was so scrumptious. I ate it like a starving wolf devouring fresh meat. After my stomach was full I felt a little guilty that these people worked so hard to serve me a nice meal that I wasn't going to pay for. I planned to make my escape before the bill arrived. I scanned the area before getting up then cautiously scampered toward the exit.

"Hey, is everything okay?" A tall waitress with her brown hair tied in a bun on top of her head questioned toward me.

"Uh," I stuttered. "Yes! Everything is fine I just have to go to the bath room," I asserted in a casual tone. She shrugged.

"Let us know if you need anything." She remarked politely then spun around on her heal and greeted another customer. When I was only a few steps from the exit I bolted out of the restaurant and dashed down the street hoping no one would notice my disappearance long

enough for me to get away.

"HEY!" An angry voice shouted in the distance. I ran for several minutes sticking to vacant narrow passage ways. I frantically turned a couple of blocks and stumbled into a crowd of people by a market place then veiled myself among them. I glanced around frazzled and was relieved when I saw no one chasing me. I wandered into an alley way out of the crowd and leaned against the wall to catch my breath.

"What am I doing?" I huffed, breathless. I felt so wretched and pathetic. How would the honorable men in the Shinsengumi judge my actions? What I had done was distasteful. I never wanted to do something like that ever again. I scanned the area, paranoid.

"I have to find them!" I panted, frustrated with myself. I was so close. I just needed one clue, someone to point me in the right direction. I couldn't wait to be with him again. I would do whatever I could to aid the Shinsengumi in this terrible war. They've been bravely fighting impossible battles. "They're true samurai." I mumbled gazing at the sky, feeling light headed.

"Hmph," A deep voice scoffed. "They're nothing but dog samurai, foolish woman. Now, hurry up. You're making me wait."

"I know, Kazama, I just-" I uttered then jerked my head side to side, scanning for him. "That voice!" I mumbled, baffled. "Had I just imagined it!?"

I stepped out of the alley way and gazed through the crowd. There was no sign of Kazama anywhere. I realized that his voice had crept inside my thoughts. I forcefully shook my head and stepped back into the crowd, and resumed my search.

I asked a few locals if they knew where the Shinsengumi were but none of them had any clues that were useful. I stumbled on the dirt and almost tripped once in the street.

"_Try not to get distracted._"

Kazama's lecturing voice ringed in my ears. I treaded through the busy streets and briefly took out the medicine bottle from my clothes, making sure it was still there after all this time.

"_Don't wear that thing outwardly conceal it._"

Kazama words continued to linger with me. I quickly hid the bottle back in my clothes. Around dusk I got a hint from a merchant that he saw a Shinsengumi member a block away just a moment ago. I sprinted in the direction he gestured but by the time I got there I saw no one. The street seemed empty. I sighed, disappointed and turned to walk back the way I came.

"Hey sweetheart, where are you heading in such a rush, eh?" A seductive voice suddenly manifested behind me.

"Woah! What a babe!" Another unfriendly voice remarked. I spun around to see three tall virulent looking men vacillating towards me.

"Uh! Please, I don't want any trouble." I pleaded, backing

away.

"Haha! Trouble she says. We're not here to cause any trouble for you honey. We just want to know what you're up to."

I staggered to the side then bolted down the street. I heard their bustling charge of pursuit. A strong arm caught me around my chest and restrained me. I thrashed my body violently.

"No!" I shouted before a moist sweaty hand was forced over my mouth. A strong thumb dug into my cheek bone and I felt finger nails pressing around my face. I muffled a scream, as loud as I could manage and tried to pull the arm around my chest off of me. The other two men caught up to us, laughing.

"Hey, hey, let me have a taste of her."

"She's a feisty one; little bitch." The man holding me growled.

One of the men ran his fingers through my hair. I glared at him. He leaned his face toward mine. He reeked of body oils and excretion. His smell was so putrid I cringed. I muffled another scream into that strong moist hand confined to my face.

"Kaâ€|zaâ€|ma." I whimpered. A tear rolled down my compressed face. I was too exhausted to fight anymore. I prayed to be rescued by Kazama with all my heart and finally shed the tears I held inside from the moment he left me. I painfully realized that I couldn't call upon Kazama anymore as much as I yearned to. I was completely on my own.

"Let's see what we got here." The man standing beside me snickered. He placed his hand on the collar of my kimono and began pulling my clothes down. I thrashed weakly. Then opened my mouth and bit into the hand on my face as hard as I could. I felt his skin slide on my teeth as I gnawed into his hand with all my might. He screeched and let go of me.

"Dumb tramp bit me!"

I screamed for help at the top of my lungs, my voice echoed through the streets. One of the men slapped me. I heard footsteps scurry toward us.

"Hey! What do you three think you're doing?" A female voice shouted.

"Get your hands off of her now!" I heard an angry voice of a man, calling out from a distance.

"Shit! Forget it!" The man that was restraining me threw my body on the dirt then took off with the other two men behind him. I fixed my clothes then staggered to my feet. I saw a small group of people approaching me.

"Hey are you okay?" A woman wrapped her arms around my shoulders.

"Looks like we came just in time, were you hurt?" Remarked a young man who approached us. He gasped suddenly.

"You!?" He yelped. I turned to my side and realized that the woman holding my shoulders was the waitress from that restaurant.

"Hey! You're that rat who skipped the bill!" She asserted angrily then glared at me. I tried to break free from her grip.

"Nuh-uh, missy, you're coming with us." One of the men in the group grunted. I had no choice but to go with them, I lost all of my strength from fighting those men. They guided me back to the restaurant and asked me to pay for the meal I skipped out on. I gave them the little money I had. It obviously wasn't enough. They debated amongst themselves.

"What should we do?"

"No idea,"

"Well looks like...we're going to just have to cut off her hands,"

"Or cut out her tongue." The men teased.

"What!?" I yelped, scared.

"You two stop that!" The waitress ordered. "Don't worry they're just being idiots." She muttered to me kindly. I nodded.

"Then what are we going to do? This girl owes us money."

"I'll tell you what we're going to do." A strict elderly man stepped out of the restaurant and scanned around the group until his hard eyes met mine. "She'll work off her debt. Bring her inside."

"Wait!" I shouted as they pushed me. "I can't work for you! I have no time."

"You should have thought of that before you skipped the bill."

"No! Please, I'll pay you back later." I begged.

"Out of the question," The stern old man remarked. "How do we know you would keep your word? Thieves cannot be trusted."

"But-"

"Would you rather us chop off your hands instead, as payment?" The old man grunted. I paused, then ceased resisting and followed them inside the restaurant.

"My name is Hotaka, I will be your manager." The old man addressed as he guided me to a room up the stairs in the restaurant. "One full day of work will be enough to pay off your debt to us. You will stay in this room tonight and start first thing in the morning, am I clear?"

I nodded my head. Hotaka turned to the waitress.

"Chika, help her get settled in."

"Alright." She replied.

"The rest of you back to work, we need to prepare the store for closing." Hotaka called out. All the men went down the stairs and the waitress gave me a weird look.

"Your clothes they smell terrible. Let me wash them for you." She remarked.

"No, you don't have to." I shyly mumbled.

"Come on, there's some daylight left. What were you doing anyway? You smell like someone who's been lost at sea. I'll be right back, wait here."

She came back with a sleeping yukata that I changed into then handed her my dirty clothes.

"Here you can wear this kimono tomorrow when you work. I'll have this done for you before you leave." She kindly gestured a pale green Kimono neatly folded into my hands. "My name is Chika by the way, my father is Hotaka. Those two ignorant men were my brothers. We run a family business here. I'm sorry if they scared you. What's your name?"

"I'm Kaori, thank you so much, and I'm really sorry for what I did."

"No matter, as long as you work it off tomorrow, everything will be okay." She smiled at me. "You had a rough day, I can tell; try to get some rest okay? Also don't pay any attention to the other workers here, no one is going to hurt you but take my advice and stay on my father's good side." Chika said then turned to leave my room.

"Hey, wait a second." I called out to her. "I need to ask you something, do you know where the Shinsengumi are staying?"

"The Shinsengumi?" The questioned surprised. "Well, I'm not sure, but if I hear anything I'll let you know okay."

"Please do! I've been searching for them. I have to find them as soon as possible!" I frantically begged.

"Alright, alright, I have a few errands to run tomorrow I'll ask around and let you know."

"Thank you so much, Chika!"

Chika nodded her head then left my room. I collapsed onto the bedding, exhausted. I felt relieved that I only had to work for a day, though it would delay everything for me. I still had to find the Shinsengumi. I decided to ask all the customers I could tomorrow and hopefully, at least one of them would know where they are staying. I snuggled into a blanket and closed my eyes.

The moment my eyes closed I saw Kazama with that awkward expression he held before chuckling back on that life boat. I opened my eyes and curled up into a ball.

"Kazama Chikage!" I whispered. I never did get a chance to call him

by his first name. I wondered how he was doing. Suddenly a tear impulsively ran down my cheek and I angrily swiped it away. I knew that where ever Kazama was he wasn't crying over me. I forced myself to forget about him in that moment and slowly lost consciousness; looking forward to the next day, a day closer to the Shinsengumi.

* * *

><p>In my dreams I was back in the ocean drowning under its murky waters. Kazama dove in after me and hastily swam over to my body and pulled me to the surface in his strong arms then hoisted us back onto the ship.<p>

"Why do you have to be such a clumsy girl?" He growled, holding me on deck.

I lifted my hand in the air and waved it around until it met his cheek then I caressed his skin gently, tracing his handsome features with the tips of my fingers.

"Hn?" He grunted with his mouth open slightly. He blinked once then his red eyes narrowed. "I hateâ€|"

* * *

><p>My eyes sprang open, bringing me back to consciousness. I lifted myself up holding my head, recalling that moment back at sea. I never found out what Kazama had said to me when he saved my life from drowning during the pirate attack. I figured he had said something like 'I hate you, foolish woman.' I struggled for several minutes to recall that moment at sea, in an attempt to decipher what Kazama uttered while he held me on that ship. I was in too much shock to hear him at that time. Perhaps it was best to not ponder over it though, since I needed to just forget all about Kazama. My time with him had ended.<p>

I got dressed in that pale green Kimono Chika left me then scurried down the stairs.

"Ah, so our little guest is finally awake." Teased the man that suggested to chopping off my hands before. I resisted the urge to glare at him. Chika gracefully scampered over to me.

"Everyone, this is Kaori, she'll be working for us today." She called out to the group of workers. She faced me. "Kaori, let me put your hair up and pin back your bangs." She fastened my hair into a tight bun and clipped my bangs on the top of my head. She quickly showed me around and instructed me on how to properly do my work.

Throughout the day I washed dishes, served food, chopped vegetables and poured sake for customers. Chika left to run a few errands and came back after some time.

"Chika! Did you find anything about the Shinsengumi when you were out?" I inquired, sprinting over to her.

"Woah, take it easy. No, I haven't but I'm heading out later on today. I'll check again."

"Please do!" I pleaded then got back to work. In the evening it was

very busy and Hotaka ordered me to serve food to a few customers in a room. I carefully carried the tray over to them. When I opened the door I gasped. The customers were the men that had attacked me earlier. I nervously introduced myself. None of them seemed to recognize me, to my relief. I must have looked like a different person dressed in different clothes and with my hair up. I served the food to them then bowed as I left the room, closing the door behind me. Then was instantly called back to work by Hotaka.

I asked a few customers if they knew where the Shinsengumi were staying but none of them were able to give me a clear answer.

At the end of the day I was ordered by Hotaka to chop vegetables in the kitchen. I heard two waitresses giggling while washing dishes.

"I know right, he was so cute!"

"I've never seen a man that looked like him before. He's so refined and elegant; I think I'm blushing."

I peeked at the two young women and giggled myself at how embarrassed one of the girls looked.

"He thanked me after I waited on him. I got the chills! His voice was so erotic."

"I know! What I like most about him are his red eyes though. They remind me of rubies."

"Red eyes!?" I screeched, dropping everything in my hands and twirling around to face them.

"Yeah!" One of the girls asserted. I faced her.

"Does he have blonde hair!?"

* * *

><p>To Be Continuedâ€|

10. Recollection

****Author's note:****

****So here it is; the second half. Woah, we're at ten chapters now. I'm glad that I was able to make it this far, I have my beta reader 14Phantom and all of you, my readers and reviewers, to thank. I hope you enjoy this chapter and early update. ****

****Also, I had some extra time lately so I made a trailer for this story that I posted on my youtube channel, gozita444, go check it out if you're interested. It's titled ****_**Hakuouki Trailer ~Kingdom of Stars~ Kazama / OC Fanfiction. **_****

****Don't forget to leave a review to let me know how I am doing, they mean a lot to me. Now let's read!****

* * *

><p>At the end of the day I was ordered by Hotaka to chop vegetables in the kitchen. I heard two waitresses giggling while washing dishes.<p>

"I know right, he was so cute!"

"I've never seen a man that looked like him before. He's so refine and elegant, I think I'm blushing."

I peeked behind me at the two young women and giggled myself at how embarrassed one of the girls looked.

"He thanked me after I waited on him. I got the chills! His voice was so erotic."

"I know! What I like most about him are his red eyes though. They remind me of rubies."

"Red eyes!" I screeched, dropping everything in my hands and twirling around to face them.

"Yeah!|" One of the girls asserted.

"Does he have blonde hair!?"

* * *

><p>~Kingdom of Stars~

Chapter Ten: Recollection

* * *

><p>"Yes, he does. Why? Do you know him?" The other woman questioned.<p>

"Uh! Not really. Where is he?"

"He is in one of the guest rooms, waiting for his meal. Chika is currently pouring sake for him."

Hotaka stood in the door way and chided to the women washing dishes.

"Hey you two, that's enough dishes for now. I need you to wait on some customers."

"Okay!" The women dried their hands then scurried out of the kitchen.

I stood there too stunned to move.

Kazama! I know they were talking about Kazama! I can't believe he's here!

My mind became littered with thoughts, racing back and forth. I debated on whether I should go see him or not. I shook the shock out of my head and started to focus on chopping a cucumber.

I can't believe he's here! What should I do!?!

My palms started to sweat as I became panicked.

_Would he be angry if I went to go see him? Did he even miss me at all? What would I say to him? _

I was so lost in thought. I hardly knew what I was doing. When I glanced down at the cucumber I was chopping I realized that I was holding the knife over my fingers and almost sliced them off. I gasped, threw the knife then backed up against the wall behind me. I let myself sink onto the floor, sitting on my legs.

What should I do? Should I go see him? Or, should I leave him alone and just forget about him?

The storm in my mind roared as I tried to find tranquility. My face became hot as I anticipated meeting Kazama again. My shaken body started to sweat as I grew more anxious. Deep down I never wanted to see him leave me. I truly wanted us to continue traveling together. I had no idea how to express that to him and I had missed my only chance back at the docks. This was a second chance for me to tell Kazama that I want to be with him but was that really the right thing to do? Would he even listen? I shut my eyes recalling his handsome otherworldly features then my mind flashed back.

* * *

><p>"Hey, what's your name?"

My eyes went wide and I popped my head up.

_"It's Kaori." I mumbled nervously. Would it be smarter to fear him instead of seeking his aid? Still, I couldn't help myself from asking him the obvious. I just had to confirm it. _

"Ummâ€|are you really uh?" I sputtered hesitantly in fear of asking him something that would anger him. He seemed irritated at my wavering question.

"What; a demon?" He asserted. I sheepishly nodded my head.

"Don't concern yourself with that. It's none of your business; you just need to get to Edo?"

I nodded, shyly.

"Then I'll take you there,"

* * *

><p>"No!" I screeched. "What happens when I take your hand? You're probably going to just drop me or cut me down once you pull me up." I wined. I fastened myself to the side of the cliff and shut my eyes. I was completely stuck, and my situation seemed hopeless. I heard Kazama sigh.

"Kaori, I won't hurt you."

_My eyes popped open at his words, and before I could comprehend what

I just heard my body acted impulsively on its own, pushing myself upward to reach him. I took his hand and was pulled up in one swift movement. My body felt light as a feather as I landed back on my feet._

* * *

><p>I gripped my hand tightly remembering the way my name ringed off his lips the first time he said it. Then I let my hands fall onto my lap, where Kazama's head once laid in the woods. My head became dizzy with nostalgic memories.<p>

* * *

><p>"Do not disobey me again." Kazama said. My head popped up. Kazama stared at me with a dull expression.

"Do you mean," I sniffed. "I can...?"

"We shouldn't waste any more time, the boat is leaving soon." He turned from me and began advancing down the street. I observed him walking away from me, baffled. I blinked the tears out of my eyes for a couple seconds then my body twitched when the shock wore off. I bolted toward Kazama, catching up with him.

* * *

><p>"No, you're off a little." He sighed. "Come here." He gestured to me to sit beside him. I moved over to his side and he motioned his arm beside my face, pointing at a luminous star with enticing beauty.

"Oh! I think I see it! It's that one, right?" I directed my finger toward a bright star glimmering in the heavens.

"Yeah, that's the one." Kazama asserted. We were sitting so close I could just barely feel his breath.

"It amazed me how something so distant could bring us so close, together.

* * *

><p>My eyes popped open at that last memory and I staggered to my feet, determined to see him. I began making my way out of the kitchen when Kazama's words tore into my mind once more, stopping me in my tracks.<p>

"_I will kill him."_

What was I doing? I shouldn't have been with Kazama from the start. After all he is the Shinsengumi's enemy. The reason why I traveled so far to get to Edo was to be reunited with him a warrior in the Shinsengumi. I had to let go of Kazama. Though I had grown to admire him so much, our time together was over. I had to accept that. If I didn't, I would never be able to move on. Besides, my heart couldn't take another goodbye from him, one was hard enough.

I formed my resolve to not see him and occupied myself with chores. Still, I couldn't get Kazama off my mind. I wondered how he would

react if he saw me again. I imagined he would get angry at seeing someone who was such a burden to him before.

"Kaori." Hotaka called out to me, standing in the kitchen doorway. "Chika stepped out to run a few errands for me. I need you to pour sake for our guest down the hall."

"What!?" I gasped. "Which guest exactly?"

"I believe Chika said he has blonde hair or something. Anyway it doesn't matter, go into the cabinet, grab some sake and attend to him. Afterwards you are free to go." Hotaka ordered then disappeared down the hall.

I felt my face get red and my body began to quiver. What was I going to do? I had just formed my resolve to not see him. Frustrated, I placed my hands on my head then realized something.

My hair was still up and my bangs clipped back. Those men from before didn't recognize me at all. Maybe if I avoided looking into Kazama's eyes or getting too close he wouldn't recognize me either. I scurried over to the cabinet, grabbed the sake then made my way bravely down the hall.

I met a waitress by the door. She was carrying a tray with food on it. She asked permission to enter the room with me. I trembled as she slowly slid the door open. Kazama looked directly at me and I quickly averted my gaze away from him. I stumbled over to his side evading eye contact. He turned his face toward mine and I bashfully kept my face in the other direction.

"Hey, you're the new girl right?" The waitress whispered. I nodded my head shyly. "If you want I can pour his sake-"

"I'd rather be served by her." Kazama grunted. I glanced at him briefly and he blinked his eyes toward me. I instantly blushed and turned away.

"Alright, excuse me." The waitress politely said as she bowed and exited the room, leaving me and Kazama alone together. I was worried why Kazama had requested me to stay; did he recognize me after all?

He held out his cup and I carefully poured the sake. He sipped it casually. I felt his crimson eyes on me and blushed, flustered. Then he turned away and picked up his chop sticks. I peeked at him. Though we had only spent a short time apart from one another it felt like I hadn't seen him in years. Kazama held a calm expression then glanced at my face and I jerked my head away, timid.

"Hn?" He grunted.

I peeked at him again and he gave me a smirk, holding out his cup. I gently poured the sake then kept my eyes on my lap.

"This sake is not bad, though its taste is a bit tart." He grumbled. I kept looking away from him. "It will soon be the season of cherry blossoms. It's tragic how short their life is. Isn't it?"

I bypassed his question, staying silent. I felt tension grow between

us.

"Are you paying attention?" Kazama questioned, irritated.

I struggled not to reply to him, hoping that he would stop asking me questions. I couldn't answer him, fearing he would recognize my voice.

"Do you not speak to your customers?" He criticized, his tone becoming disturbed. I remained silent. "How insulting, you should be fired." He chided. My head popped up. I became so distressed my eyes started to blur with tears I forcefully held back.

"Hmph." He scoffed. "You also need to look at your customers. My cup has been empty for a while now."

I shyly began pouring him more sake. I was so shaky I accidentally spilled some.

"How blasphemous, sake this good should never be spilled so carelessly." He remarked.

"Hn," I whimpered, resisting the urge to apologize.

"Clumsy girl." Kazama grunted. He began eating his meal and for that moment ceased speaking to me. I was able to relax a little. I felt relieved that he didn't seem to know who I was. He ate silently for several minutes. I was anxious to get out of there as soon as possible. When he was nearly finished with his meal I sensed his eyes on me again.

"That scar," Kazama remarked. I gasped placing my hand on my neck. "It's hideous." He cruelly asserted, staring at my skittish face. I had completely forgotten about that scar, from when Kazama sliced the skin on my neck with his blade, back in the woods.

I turned my face toward his and looked into his crimson eyes, at last.

"I see you're still alive. So why are you in a place like this?" He growled, displeased. I bit my lip nervously.

"Umâ€¦"

"Hn?" He grunted, impatient.

"You know who I am?" I mumbled.

"I've known all along, Kaori."

I blushed, feeling embarrassed.

"I never forget a face." He said, staring into my watery eyes. "Tell me why you are here."

"Well, Iâ€¦" I looked away sheepish. How could I tell him that I skipped the bill? I didn't want Kazama to think of me as a dishonorable person. I wanted to appear strong to him so he wouldn't think of me as a burden. I wanted him to think I could handle myself on my own.

"Is someone forcing you to stay here?" He inquired, inspecting me with eagerness in his eyes.

"Uh! No that's not it," My head jolted upward, facing Kazama.

"Do I have to take care of something?"

I forcefully shook my head.

"Someone?" He interrogated.

"No! Everything is fine! I've been doing great without you!" I blurted out, foolishly committing a blunder. Kazama lifted an eyebrow.

"You've been doing great?" He criticized; I could tell he wasn't fooled. "Then how come it's so hard for you to tell me why you are here?"

"It doesn't matter, okay." I pleaded.

"I grow tired of this. When I ask you a question, I expect you to answer it." He persisted.

"I'm sorry. I don't understand why you want to know so badly."

"Do I have to break you out of here?"

"What!?"

He stared at me, aggravated. He held the cup of sake a few inches from his face, his eyes narrowed. "Alright, since you leave me no choice-

"I skipped the bill." I admitted, cutting him off. His arm fell on his lap and his eyes widen a bit.

"You skipped the bill?"

I sat there blushing, trying to hold a tough expression. He gave me a disgusted look then chuckled.

"I had a hunch that you couldn't handle it on your own. You're a mess."

"I'm fine!" I asserted, embarrassed.

"Why didn't you tell me who you were?"

"Huh?"

"Hn?"

"I just didn't want you to know that it was me."

"I'm insulted that you think you could trick me. What was the point?"

"Um, I didn't want to be a burden to you; since you tried so hard to

get rid of me."

"What does that have to do with anything?" He growled, aggravated.

"Well--"

"Enough, you really are no different. All you humans are the same, deceiving and disrespectful."

"That's not true at all! I do respect you and I am very grateful to you, Kazama; I really wanted to tell you that before andâ€|"

"So why didn't you?"

_It's because saying goodbye was the hardest thing I've done so far on this journey. _

"I just didn't know how to word it." I bashfully mumbled.

_Kazama, truthfully I never wanted to see you go. I've missed you terribly this whole time. You're still searching for the Shinsengumi yourself right? I want us to travel and work together again. I really miss you! _

"I see." Kazama grunted, standing up.

"Kazama?"

"I don't have all night to chat with you. You're wasting my time." He said as he advanced toward the door.

I fought the urge to scream and beg him not to leave. I desperately wanted to apologize and beseech him to let us travel together again, in search of the Shinsengumi.

"Kazama, wait!" I called out. He halted right before the door. I managed to clear my mind. "Pleaseâ€|take care of yourself."

He turned around and glanced down at me. I gave him the smile I wanted to give him back on the docks. A tear escaped my right eye and rolled gracefully down my cheek. His sharp expression lightened.

"You as well." He said, turning away from me again.

I watched him as he walked out of the room and sat there with my hands clenched in fists on my lap. I finally got to see him again, but our second goodbye left me stricken in tears. I didn't want him to leave me thinking that I wasn't grateful for all he had done for me. I still wanted to tell Kazama how I admired him and grown to think of him as my ally.

I reminisced over our time together and of what just happened for a moment, staring at the door he walked out of. Upon recollecting myself I became aware of what I missed my only chance to do. I wanted to continue searching for the Shinsengumi with Kazama, not because I needed him but because I had missed him so much. I had to tell him that. I smacked the tears off my face and sprang onto my feet. I couldn't let it all end like this. I was determined to be with him

again.

"Kazama!" I yelled, dashing out of the restaurant. I was going to confess my admiration to Kazama and throw my arms around his body to force him to listen if it was necessary. The sun had already gone down. The streets were dark and vacant. I caught a glimpse of Kazama turning a corner a few blocks away. I prepared myself to sprint after him then suddenly, I was pulled back.

"Kaori! There you are." Chika said gripping my arm.

"Chika! That blonde customer came by here right?" I said exasperated.

"You mean the one I was serving before? Yes, I just saw him pass by here."

"Thank you!" I pushed forward but Chika hadn't let go of my arm.

"Hey!" I screeched. "Let go, what are you doing?"

"Kaori, wait a minute." She ordered.

"Why!?"

"I've found the Shinsengumi." She asserted. "Geez, you were the one that kept begging to know their whereabouts."

"Wait!? You've found them!" I yelled, stunned. "Where are they? Tell me!" I demanded.

"I stumbled into one of their members who told me where to find their headquarters just moments ago. If you head down that path toward the end of the street then turn a few blocks on the right, you'll be sure to find it. It's quite a distance away but you can't miss it. There's a sign posted there." She gestured toward a street opposite from the one Kazama took. "But you have to hurry if you want to catch up with them. I heard they are preparing to go defend Koufu Castle right now."

"Thank you so much Chika!" She let go of my arm and I bowed to her.

"I know why you weren't able to find them before." She continued. "Did you know that they changed their name?"

"Huh?"

"They're known as the Kouyou Chinbutai now."

"They changed their name!? No wonder I couldn't find them!"

"Also, I've finished washing your clothes, so stop by later to pick them up. You're a free woman now." She chirped giving me a smile then went back inside the restaurant.

I turned and faced the two paths in front of me. After all this time I had finally found the Shinsengumi. If it wasn't for Kazama I wouldn't have ever made it here. I hesitated unsure which path was the

best one to choose. If I caught up with Kazama perhaps I could still make it to see the Shinsengumi in time but is it worth the risk?

I had already formed my resolve. It was time for me to make my move. I clenched my fists, knowing which path I had to take and hastily dashed forward with avidity and bliss in my heart.

* * *

><p>To Be Continuedâ€|

Author's note:

**Which path did she choose? Leave your prediction in a review XD
**

**Thanks for reading! **

11. A Major Flaw

Author's note:

**I'm sorry for the SUPER late update. I've worked hard on this chapter between school and work. This is by far my longest and most time-consuming chapter. I even had to do research for this one so PLEASE LEAVE A REVIEW! It's helps a lot. For those of you who reviewed my last chapter, no words can describe my gratitude, thank you so much. **

Also, before I forget to mention, I have an amazing beta-reader, 14Phantom.

* * *

><p>I turned and faced the two paths in front of me. After all this time I had finally found the Shinsengumi. If it wasn't for Kazama I wouldn't had ever made it here. I hesitated unsure which path was the best one to choose. If I caught up with Kazama perhaps I could still make it to see the Shinsengumi in time but is it worth the risk?<p>

I had already formed my resolve. It was time for me to make my move. I clenched my fists, knowing which path I had to take and hastily dashed forward with avidity and bliss in my heart.

* * *

><p>~Kingdom of Stars~

Chapter 11: A Major Flaw

* * *

><p>My footsteps trampled loudly as I rapidly sprinted through the streets, shrouded by the darkened fog of night.<p>

"I have to hurry!" I whispered breathlessly to myself. "I have to catch up to you!"

Cold air gasped into my lungs stinging the back of my throat with each breath I painfully inhaled. A burning sensation cramped the tired muscles in my legs. Tormented by great physical strain I resisted the urge to rest as several minutes passed, each feeling like hours.

"Waitâ€¦forâ€¦meâ€¦" I panted, racing as fast as I could force myself. I swiftly bolted around a few blocks then scanned the area. "I've found you!"

I thrashed my body through the entrance then fell onto my knees, in anguish.

"The Shinsengumi, they're not here!" I cried, gazing into the empty hall that was their headquarters. I realized that they had already moved onto Koufu Castle and I had just missed them.

"No! Where are you?!" I whined as I let my body fall onto the hard ground, exhausted. After I caught my breath I slowly rose and staggered toward the street. I glanced once over my shoulder at their vacant headquarters wondering if I would ever find him. I had a new destination and couldn't afford to waste time. I anticipated the worst, fearing that the bloody vicissitude of the country's metamorphosis would drag the man I was searching for underneath the chaos and beyond my reach.

Crushed and destitute, I began my journey back to the restaurant. I still needed to get my clothes.

The murky and hollow streets were illuminated dimly by the light shining from the stars in the sky. I glanced upward at that star I once venerated in Kazama's arms. I had no idea where I could find Kazama at that moment. Disheartened, I compelled myself not to search for him. It was too late to catch up with him anyway.

My frigid body shivered violently from the chilly breeze in the air.

"The Shinsen-" I whimpered, coughing into my cold hands. "No, the Kouyou Chinbutai, I'll be going to Koufu Castle, wait for me there." I begged.

It took nearly twice as long for me to get back to the restaurant as I sluggishly dragged my body onward. I saw Chika sweeping dried crusty leaves in front of the restaurant.

"Kaori! Back already?" She called out to me, putting down the broom and rushing to my side. "So, did you find them?"

I weakly shook my head, unable to speak.

"That's a shame. Come on inside, it's really getting cold." She kindly uttered grabbing hold of my shoulders and guiding me inside the restaurant. "Poor thing you look so tired. How about you stay one more night, I'll pass it by Hotaka."

"Thank you. I'll leave first thing in the morning." I mumbled.

"Where do you intend to go?"

"The same place the Kouyou Chinbutai are heading, Koufu Castle."

"Are you sure you want to be in the middle of a fierce battle? They're going to defend the Castle from the pro-imperialist faction." She questioned with worried eyes.

"I don't think I have any other choice."

"Well you at least shouldn't be going alone. Wait, I know! You should go with that handsome blonde friend of yours." Chika inquired blinking an eye.

"What?! He's not my friend, just someone I know that's all." I asserted, my face getting hot.

"Not a friend, huh?" She taunted. "It doesn't seem that way to me. At least not from what I've heard from the other waitresses who gossiped about how he wanted _you_ to pour sake for him." She giggled.

"They gossiped about us?"

"Of course, men that fine don't come by here that often. He was a real treat for the eyes." She laughed, blushing. "Me and the other girls have a feeling he came just to see you, so tell me is he your lover?"

"What?! Lover?! No!" I nervously stuttered. "You got it all wrong, we barley know each other and he's not my boyfriend." I bashfully asserted. _Like hell Kazama would ever make me his lover._

"Well, anyways you really shouldn't be heading into battle alone. I suggest asking Blondie to escort you." She insisted.

I felt winded and coughed into my hands, my body tensed. "I know that I shouldn't be going alone but I don't need _B__londie_ to escort me." I chided. I pictured the last moment I spent with Kazama and wondered where he was.

* * *

><p>"How insulting, you should be fired."

"I had a hunch that you couldn't handle it on your own. You're a mess."

"Enough, you really are no different. All you humans are the same, deceiving and disrespectful."

"I don't have all night to chat with you. You're wasting my time."

* * *

><p>"I'll be fine." I continued. "Besidesâ€|he doesn't even like me."<p>

"Aw, come'on now." She provoked. "It would be so romantic to go on an epic adventure with him, you should really-"

"I don't need that stupid jerk!" I hollered out of frustration. Chika's eyes widen and she immediately became silent.

"I was just making a joke." She criticized.

"I know. I'm sorry. I'm just really tired. Thank you so much for all you've done for me. If it's okay I think I better go to bed now, I have a long day ahead of me tomorrow."

"Alright, I'm sorry for keeping you. Get some sleep. I'll see you in the morning." Chika trotted back outside to finish cleaning.

I scampered up the stairs to the room I had previously stayed in. I noticed my clean clothes were neatly folded in the corner of the room as well as a sleeping yukata that I quickly changed into.

Something familiar glimmered in the corner of my eye and I peeked out the window at the still placid sky. Kazama's star hadn't left me in the streets but had followed me all the way to the restaurant casting a deep undefined longing in my heart.

"You're such a jerk Kazama! I don't need you." I found myself rambling to the heavens. "I can take care of myself on my own. Things are finally the way they are supposed to be; just me, alone, searching for the Kouyou Chinbutai; just how it was in the beginning." I mumbled plopping down into the bed. "I don't need your help anymore, Blondie!" I grunted.

I found myself giggling at the thought of Kazama's reaction to being called 'blondie' then I pulled the covers up to my face, feeling the tension in my body evaporate.

"Where ever you are Kazama—just be safe."

* * *

><p>I was visited by an evil spirit in my dreams, the same haunting incubus from before. As it reared its nostalgic presence into my inner consciousness, I found it harder to compress unwanted memories.<p>

The horror began with a flash of blinding light that peeled through the lids of my eyes. My ears vibrated with muffled voices. As the scenery became more focused I observed a crowd of curious people circling around me. I sat in the middle of the crowd on a cloth wearing a white open kimono. An instrument of death lied in front of me next to a piece of literature. Mortified, I scanned the anxious faces around me until my eyes landed on the fiend that manifested itself into my nightmare. The little girl who danced aimlessly around a field in my previous dream stood amongst the spectators still wearing that pale pink mask of a devil on her face.

"You should have been the one." She whispered.

Acting without thought, I abruptly grasped the short sword in front of me and positioned the blade before my stomach and just before I released my soul my eyes sprang open.

* * *

><p>I bolted upward in a panic and placed my hands on my stomach. There was no blood and everything seemed normal. I sighed, relieved, then rummaged through my things preparing to get dressed. I found the medicine bottle with the 'X' mark on it and placed it in the palm of my hand.<p>

"Generation X" I mumbled to myself. "I wonder what it all really means."

After getting dressed, in my own clothes, I concealed the bottle in my garments and put my hair up, in the usual way, wearing it down with the sides bounded by a ribbon. On my way downstairs I overheard a conversation Hotaka was having with a costumer.

"Tell me what business you have with her." Hotaka demanded.

"Just tell me where she is. I must see with Kaori." A strong female voice pleaded. How could this stranger know my name? Cautiously I snuck up the stairs a bit, hiding myself.

I didn't recognize this voice. I wondered if I was being hunted down for the medicine bottle that I carried and suspected that this person met trouble.

"Oh, Kaori, you're finally awake." Chika cheerfully said meeting me by the stairs.

"Chika, is there a back door I can sneak out of?" I frantically asked.

"Yes of course, what's the matter? Why would you have to sneak out?"

"Could you tell me where it is?"

"Sure, it's this way." She gestured for me to follow her. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing, I just really need to get going."

Chika brought me to the back door.

"Good luck Kaori, I hope you find the Kouyou Chinbutai." Chika kindly cheered then closed the door.

I treaded through an ally way escaping the restaurant. Then suddenly a black shadow materialized in front of me. I yelped and backed away.

"Are you Kaori?" The same female voice I heard inside the restaurant asked. She stood before me in ninja-like apparel.

I felt threatened and leaped passed her, charging out of the ally way.

"Hey! Come back here." She ordered.

Suddenly I was grabbed. "Let go!" I shouted.

"Please just calm down." She pleaded.

I thrashed my fists around trying to fight my way out of her grip. She scoffed. I noticed some people casually going about their business on the street and inhaled deeply preparing to scream for help.

"You're making this a lot harder than it has to be." She complained then shoved a cloth in front of my face. I instantly lost all my energy and my eyes slowly crept shut. I commanded my body to move but all of my mobility ceased. A dark cloud poisoned my consciousness, tucking away my thoughts and causing my world to go blank.

* * *

><p>â€|<p>

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><p>My eyes fluttered open as my head swayed back and forth, shaking myself awake. I fought to move my hands to scratch my head but my movements were restricted. Upon thrashing my arms out to my sides I realized that my hands were bounded to my back and my ankles were tied with a thick rope. My heart raced from within my chest.<p>

I've been kidnapped!

Panicked, I wiggled my body together, using all the strength from my nauseated muscles to sit up. The room I was confined in was elegant and decorated with rich ornaments and vases. I wondered where I was, who had brought me here, and most of all, why. Then I heard voices mumbling from outside the room I was imprisoned in.

Faint footsteps lurked toward the entrance. I glared at the door, with both fear and animosity. Then as abruptly as the sound of footsteps appeared, they halted right before the chambers of my forced captivity. Then the door gradually slid open.

The woman in ninja attire, that had assaulted me, appeared before the door.

"Princess, she has awakened." She called out.

"Oh really, how is sh-" A vivacious voice began, as a petite girl peeked her head around the door. "Kimigiku! What did you do to her?" She complained. Upon seeing her face my eyes grew wide, recalling the woman I had met in the woods on my way to Edo.

"Sen!" I gleefully shouted. She turned her gaze away from me and glared at the woman she referred to as Kimigiku.

"Why is she tied up? You didn't harm her did you?" She interrogated.

"I had a very hard time tracking her down. When I finally found the woman you described, she tried to run away. I had no choice but to knock her out. I was worried she would try to run away again when I brought her here so I tied her up. Forgive me, princess. I truly met this one no harm." She obediently remarked, bowing to Sen. "I'll

untie her."

Sen kneeled down beside me as Kimigiku released me from the ropes.

"I'm sorry if she hurt you. Her name is Kimigiku. Her family serves me. We mean you no harm at all." She kindly asserted. "I'm glad to see that you're doing well." She merrily chirped.

"I'm happy to see you again to but why have you brought me here?" I questioned, rubbing my sore wrists.

"There is something I wanted to ask you." Her face suddenly became serious.

"Something you want to ask me?" I blinked confused. I felt a twist of vibrations in my stomach as a loud gurgling growl echoed into the room. I blushed, apologetically. "Sorry I haven't had anything to eat today, what do you want to ask me?"

"It can wait, for now you should eat something. Let me treat you for bringing you here against your will."

"No, no, that's not necessary. I don't want to cause any trouble. After all I'm in a bit of a hurry to get to Koufu Caste."

"I know! How about we cook a meal together!" Sen clasped her hands together in excitement. "Please, Kaori, I feel so bad for locking you in this room, besides no one should travel on an empty stomach."

She had a point. Under all the excitement I hadn't even realized I was starving. I nodded my head shyly, in agreement. Sen helped me to my feet.

"Well come'on the kitchen is this way." She guided me down a hallway then turned to Kimigiku. "Kimigiku, could you keep watch over things and report back to me later?" The tall beautiful woman nodded. "Of course, princess." She bowed then trotted off. Sen continued to direct me to the kitchen.

"Hey, Sen." I called out to her. "Where am I, exactly?"

"Oh! I forgot to mention. We're at one of my residencies in Edo. Not too far from where Kimigiku found you. Don't worry you're safe." She said with a reassuring smile.

I sighed in relief. "That's good to hear. Actually I was afraid that I was being kidnapped by furies or something."

Sen immediately narrowed her eyes and stared at me with a straight face.

"So you do know about them." She remarked, leaning in closer to me.

"Um, yeah. Kazama and I encountered some of them in the woods before. I don't know much about furies at all." I stuttered, taken back by Sen's sudden shift in tone.

"They're better known as Rasetsu. So you're saying you didn't know of

their existence until you encountered them in the woods, a few days back?" She inquired.

"No, I've never heard of them before."

"How can that be? You carry the generation X bottle around your neck." She interrogated.

"I'm being honest. I don't know anything about this generation X thing either."

Sen handed me some vegetables to chop and a knife then she walked over to a cabinet, pulling out cooking utensils.

"Actually," Sen began. "That's what I wanted to ask you about. I want to know your connection to that bottle, where you got it from, and why you wear it around your neck."

My eyes widen and my heart skipped a beat at her request.

"Senâ€|" I stuttered. "It was just a gift from a loved one."

She scampered back over to me, preparing some dishes.

"A gift? Who gave it to you?" She questioned, glaring into my shaky eyes.

"I rather not talk about it, if that's okay." I bashfully looked away from her, focusing on chopping the vegetable in front of me. I felt Sen studying my every move.

"Kaori, I really need to know." She pleaded in a calm tone.

"So what are we making here?" I bypassed her question, gesturing my hands toward the food. She sighed.

"I was thinking we could make some soup. If that's okay."

"Yeah that's fine with me." I nodded. We were silent for several awkward seconds.

"Kaoriâ€|" Sen inquired. "At least tell me one thing. Did you drink it?"

"What?"

"Did you drink the liquid inside of that bottle?"

"No, what liquid? The bottle was empty when I received it."

"I see. Well, I figured you didn't drink it anyway, given that you still have your sanity."

"My sanity?" I yelped, glancing back at her. She turned away from me and prepared some water in a large bowl. " Senâ€|" I called out to her in an intrusive tone, demanding answers. "What is generation X?" I grasped the perplexing bottle in my hand and studied the esoteric 'X' carving on it.

"It is known as the most powerful elixir in history, you've never

heard of its development?" Sen asserted, directing her focus toward the mystifying bottle.

"No, I haven't. Could you please tell me Sen. I really want to know all I can about his bottle."

"Well, the elixir was developed by humans in order for them to obtain the powers of demons. It all began several years ago in the Sengoku Period. Back then, the situation between demons and humans was a bit different. The Oni used to be very powerful and were united into ten clans under the leadership of the great Oni, Yase-hime. War between the humans and the Oni was not an uncommon thing. They despised each other deeply during that time. When tensions rose between the two, the humans schemed mischievously to terminate the existence of the Oni."

"What?" My grip on the bottle tightened. "Humans tried to kill off the Oni race?"

"Yes, that much hasn't really changed. Humans have always been ravenous and greedy over the powers of Oni and tried to use their powers for their own benefit and were quick to feel threatened when their demands were denied. Sometime around the death of Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the battle of Sekigahara the humans developed a powerful elixir to compete with the powers of demons. It is said that this elixir was extracted from using various body parts of demons. The Oni clans were completely oblivious to the elixirs development because demons were strictly prohibited from interacting with the human world."

Sen's glance at the bottle in my hand turned into a glare. Then she continued.

"At first there were several different prototypes that were said to be failures until one elixir stood out from the rest. This elixir was referred to as generation X since it took nearly generations to complete and were contained in small glass bottles with an X mark carved into it. Only a few samples of this powerful elixir were ever developed, generated from rare resources. Upon testing generation X for the first time, the humans finally were successful in obtaining the powers of an Oni. This legendary monster was the most powerful Rasetsu ever created and it even possessed strengths and abilities that surpassed the average demon." Her eyes turned away from the bottle. "But it had one major flaw."

"A flaw?"

"Sometime after transforming, it lost all reason and even began attacking human villages in a lust for blood. Many humans and demons alike battled this one god-like Rasetsu and lost their lives. It got so out of control that all ten heads of the demon clans, a group called the Jukkishuu, came together to fight one fierce battle against this transcendental beast. It took the efforts of all the clans to finally bring it down."

"So it was more powerful than demons themselves?!" I hollered, awestruck. Sen nodded.

"Humans immediately ceased experimentation in fear of manufacturing the same uncontrollable creature and banded any form of research on

the Rasetsu. It is rumored though, that two samples of generation X were lost during the chaos. It was a major concern at the time but after many years passed, without a trace of these medicine bottles, the rumors were quickly discarded."

I glanced down at the bottle in my hand, appalled of its bloody past.

"A few years ago a report of one of these bottles resurfacing spread through the top human organizations in foreign countries. This incident started experimentation on the Rasetsu again. The humans are currently searching for ways to perfect what they now call the 'Water of Life' in order to re-create an improved version of generation X. The original formula for generation X, however, has been lost since the battle of Sekigahara. Most Oni leaders are speculative about the presence of generation X still lurking in this world since they don't believe any trace of it could possibly be left behind after all these years."

Sen prepared the soup in a large bowl.

"Hmm, this smells so good! We need to let it cook for a little while." She gleefully lightened the tense atmosphere in the room with her ecstatic voice.

I concealed the bottle in my clothes and nodded my head toward Sen.

"Princess!" Kimigiku called out charging into the kitchen. "I have something urgent to report." She inhaled to continue speaking but hesitated upon glancing over at me.

"Uh, Kaori," Sen mumbled toward me. "Would you mind stepping outside for a moment. I'll come get you when the soup is done, okay." She gave me a smile.

"Alright, thank you so much Sen." I said, bowing to her. Kimigiku slid a door open from within the kitchen that led outside. I trotted out the door and waited patiently. After several minutes I explored the area outside Sen's residence; it was an elegant structure. I ventured toward the front of the building and leaned on the edge of a corner, gazing at the clear sky. Then I detected Sen's voice discussing something and listened to her opening a sliding door to the entrance. Suddenly I heard footsteps from around the corner I was leaning on.

"What are you doing here?!" I heard Sen frantically ask.

Then my ears captured a deep male voice I immediately recognized.

"I have come for you, my Oni princess."

* * *

><p>To Be Continuedâ€|

**Please don't forget to leave a review, thanks for reading, you're awesome! **

12. The Possibility of Love

****Author's note: ****

****Gosh, what a late update! I got so behind on this story due to exams but now that they're all officially over, here is the next chapter! ****

****I am looking forward to your reviews on this chapter, which actually turned out longer than the last one. ****

****A special thanks to my super awesome, amazing, talented beta-reader, 14Phantom, as well as mariko85, allylovedward, Ainhoall, ravenscry21, The Queen of Water, zhera, Arcee-chan, BANEHiwatari, barrentrees, ANON, unknown and guest readers, and everyone else that has reviewed my recent chapters and has favorited/followed my story thus far. You guys keep this story going!****

* * *

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"What are you doing here?!" I heard Sen frantically ask.

Then my ears captured a deep male voice I immediately recognized.

"I have come for you, my Oni princess."

* * *

><p>~Kingdom of Stars~

Chapter Twelve: The Possibility of Love

* * *

><p>A voice my ears once longed to hear echoed through my mind, drowning all my senses. It was very familiar yet out of tune from way it was spoken to me.<p>

At that instant I knew exactly why he came here; to marry Sen and force her to bear his child.

"Come for me?!" Sen asked losing her breath.

"Yes." I could hear him smirk behind his words. "Ancient female Oni of Yase, I trust you haven't forgotten the promise you made."

"Now?" Sen questioned.

"I thought I told you to be prepared for this." He criticized. I imagined the glare in his crimson eyes.

"I'm in the middle of something, you have to come back la-" Sen uttered, then paused in the middle of her words. I peeked around the corner and saw Kazama pressing his lips on Sen's. Her face became flushed and her eyes grew wide.

"That's not part of our deal," Kazama spoke softly onto her quivering lips. "You will conceive my child today." He ordered, closing his red eyes and leaning in for another kiss.

SMACK

Sen slapped Kazama across his face. I saw his eyes grow wide for a split second then narrow angrily.

"Damn you," He growled.

"If you want to make love to a woman," Sen lectured, glaring up at him. "You must learn to behave!"

"Don't test my patience. You gave me your word. If you don't fulfill your promise willingly, I will make you." He chided, grabbing Sen's chin with his strong hand.

"I never break a promise!" Sen angrily shouted at his face. Her hands clenched onto his wrist. "But I'm going to have to ask you to come back later."

Kazama gave her a sadistic smile.

"I refuse." He asserted.

"How ungrateful, your child will be the descent of the great Oni Suzuka Gozen and have a very high status! You can wait!"

Kazama glared at her, fury burning in his eyes.

"Princess!" Kimigiku bursted out the entrance and chopped her hand between Kazama and Sen in one quick motion. Kazama pulled away from Sen just in time, avoiding impact. Kimigiku bolted in front of the Oni princess in a protective fighting stance.

Clink

Kazama lifted his sword from its sheath with his thumb, prepared to strike her down.

"Hn." He grunted.

"Stop it! Both of you!" Sen begged then nudged Kimigiku to the side and faced Kazama.

"Kazama listen, I will fulfill my promise to you today," She began.

"Princess!" Kimigiku gasped.

"Hn," Kazama grinned.

"All I ask is that you give me some time to finish something. Then I will be ready for you." She confirmed in a calm tone.

"Fine," Kazama agreed. "Do whatever it is quickly, I'll wait here."

I leaped to the side, concealing myself from their sight then wrapped

my arms around my body tightly. My knees shook as I forced my legs to keep me standing.

_Why do I feel so nervous and heartsick? _

I focused on my breathing for several seconds and wondered if Sen was looking for me. For some reason I didn't want to see her. All I wanted to do was dash out of there but I felt too conflicted to even move.

It became completely silent. I felt the tension in my muscles begin to melt away and then my eyes gazed up at the sky.

"Are you hiding yourself from me again?" Kazama called out. I jumped at his words and sheepishly glanced around the corner. He was sitting on the stairs up to the entrance staring in my direction.

"Um! No!" I stuttered, revealing myself from behind the wall.

"What are you doing here?" He interrogated, in an irritated tone.

"Iâ€¦um" I mumbled shyly, taking a step toward him.

"Why don't you listen to anything?" He scolded, giving me a disgusted look.

"Sen brought me here." I confirmed, my face getting hot.

"Hn?" Kazama tilted his head keeping his angry eyes on me.

"She wanted to ask me about this." I continued, pulling out the generation X bottle from within my garments.

"I see." He said looking away from me with a bored expression on his face.

I placed the bottle back in my clothes and scurried over to his side, he avoided eye contact with me.

"Hey, Kazamaâ€¦" I began trying to get his attention. He ignored me for a few seconds. I pouted and plopped down next to him on the stairs. "There's something I want to ask you."

"Hn?"

"Wellâ€¦" I began, shuddering from the uncertainty of his response.

"What is it?" He remarked, annoyed.

"Um, nothingâ€¦" I bashfully glanced at his face. He looked at me like I was a complete idiot. I swallowed hard; preparing myself to utter the question I was eager to ask him before. "Hey, kazama, do you think we couldâ€¦travel together again?"

He let out a sigh, turning his gaze away from me.

"I pursue the Kouyou Chinbutai for different reasons than you do. My prime objective right now isn't to find them." He remarked. "I have

fought the Kouyou Chinbutai before in the past and I plan to finish a fight with one of their members."

"I know."

"Yet, you want to travel with me again. Are you endlessly foolish?"

"I don't care that you want to fight one of their members. All I want from the Kouyou Chinbutai is to be reunited with one person. Besides the main reason I want to travel with you again isâ€¦" I lowered my gaze onto my fist, pressing on my lap. "I really miss you."

"Humans," Kazama began. I glanced up at his remote expression. "Are such weak and worthless creatures."

Kazama thinks I'm weak and worthless?!

"They only destroy things without any respect, not even for the people they hurt. Their way of solving conflicts is by waging war with one another. They strive for money and power, it's disgusting really." Kazama disputed.

"And they forget all the pain and sorrow it causes." I added. "The only thing most of them care about is victory. People who don't behave in that way, are a rarity in this world, especially those who possess a pure warrior's spirit. Like, the men in the Kouyou Chinbutai who don't fight for power or money but for ideals."

"Those dogs are a bunch of ruthless fake warriors, fighting a meaningless battle." He argued.

"No, they are true samurai. They make mistakes sometimes but they always fight for what they believe in. I know because the man that I search for is like that."

"You make no sense." He grumbled. "Hn, you sound just like her."

"Hn? Like Who?"

"Kaori! I've been searching everywhere for you!" Sen hollered out from behind us. Kazama and I spun around to face her. "And to think I find you here of all places." She said glancing down at Kazama.

"You're ready for me now, I presume." Kazama grinned.

She was dressed in a white sleeping yukata decorated with sun flowers. Kazama treaded up the stairs. Sen scampered past him and sat down next to me.

"Kaori listen, there's something I have to care of. May I ask that you wait for me? I really want us to enjoy the soup we made together." She whispered.

"Um, okay. I'll wait."

"Feel free to explore the garden while you wait. I promise this won't

take long."

"I'm done with waiting, princess." Kazama stressed.

"Hold on, I'm coming. Geez, where did you learn patience?" Sen complained. Kazama growled.

I watched as they both entered Sen's house.

Once they were out of my sight I ventured into Sen's garden.

"_Humans are weak and worthless creatures."_

Kazama really didn't care about me at all. I found myself running until I came across some bushes and collapsed beside them. Why did I feel so hopeless and pessimistic? It shouldn't matter whether Kazama rejected me or not, all that really matters is finding a way to get to Koufu Castle.

I pulled my knees up to my body and stuffed my face into them.

"Kazamaâ€¦all I want is for you to like me." I mumbled.

Stop it! Don't you dare cry! You have a mission, to find the Kouyou Chinbutai . Not chase a demon around who only hates your guts!

I lectured in my head convincing myself that Kazama didn't matter. After several long minutes of waiting, my eyes wondered to the sky.

"What?!" I gasped. "That star!"

Through the clear cerulean sky I thought I saw a star for a moment then realized I had only imagined it. For some reason I felt that time I spent with Kazama under the stars, I took for granted. It was the very first time, and probably the last, he was ever truly kind to me. Kazama's warmth, the way he chuckled, and the grin he gave me all flooded my memories causing a smile to crease on my face. What I wouldn't give to see that smile again.

* * *

><p>My head suddenly felt dizzy as I imagined myself thrashing through the bone chilling waters of the ocean then being hoisted back onto the ship in one swift movement.

Why do you have to be such a clumsy girl?" He growled, holding me on deck.

I lifted my hand in the air and waved it around until it met his cheek then I caressed his skin gently, tracing his handsome features with the tips of my fingers.

Hn?" He grunted with his mouth open slightly. He blinked once then his red eyes narrowed. "I hateâ€¦!"

* * *

><p>I had never fully recalled Kazama's words to me when he rescued me from drowning that night but I could easily decipher the rest of his words.<p>

"_I hate you." _

I was nothing but a filthy human to him. It was no wonder why he didn't want anything to do with me again.

Some more time elapsed. My hands shook with frustration. I sprang onto my feet.

"No more waiting, I'm sorry Sen." I mumbled. "I can't afford to waste any more time. I have to get to Koufu Castle before I miss my chance to catch up with the Kouyou Chinbutai!"

"You're not going anywhere on an empty stomach." A perky voice echoed from beside me. I spun around on my heel and noticed Sen grinning at me. Upon gazing at her ruffled hair I assumed that Kazama had finished his business with her.

"Sen, um where isâ€|"

"Kazama?" She asserted. I nodded my head. A mischievous grin crossed her face that made me a bit nervous.

"Why? Do you miss him?" She joked.

"What?! No." I confirmed as Sen giggled.

"Don't worry he didn't leave yet. Come'on our soup is getting cold!" She cheered, grabbing my wrist and forced me inside her house. We both sat down in a dining room with the soup placed on trays in front of us.

"Hey Kaori, did Kazama really travel with you in those woods?" Sen inquired.

"Yeah, all the way to Edo." I asserted. Sen gazed at me in amazement. "What is that so hard to believe?"

"Of course! It baffles me. Kazama is a proud demon and from what I've heard he hates humans yet he escorted a pretty young girl all the way to Edo." She chirped.

"It's not what you think. It wasn't easy at first. He was rude to me most of the time." I remarked.

"Were you attacked by furies at all?"

"Yeah, in the woods I was almost captured by a group of furies that wanted me for the generation X bottle that I carry. Thankfully though, Kazama was there to save me." I felt myself smile.

"I can't believe Kazama would save a human! Kaori that's phenomenal!"

"If you say soâ€|"

"How did you two get to Edo?"

"We boarded a massive ship but then it was attacked by pirates."

"Pirates?!"

"Yeah, and we were kind of kicked off by the passengers."

"Are you saying you two swam all the way to Edo?" She teased, stunned. I laughed.

"No, no Kazama rowed us to shore on a life boat. He interpreted a map to Edo that was written in the stars."

"Kazama rowed you in a lifeboat?! Wait we are talking about the same blonde demon here, right?" She laughed.

"Um, yeah." I blushed.

"Wow, I'd say you're probably the first human he has ever warmed up to." She said with glee.

"Huh? I'm the first one?"

"Yep, you must have really made an impression."

"Well, I'm pretty sure he doesn't care about me at all."

We were both silent all of a sudden, focusing on savoring the meal in front of us. When we were about half way done Sen gave me a serious look.

"Hm? What is it?" I questioned.

"Kaori, I hate to bug you on this again but are you ready to tell me who gave that bottle to you?"

My throat closed as I tried to swallow causing me to cough.

"Senâ€¦I'm sorry but trust me it doesn't matter who gave me this bottle."

"Why?"

"Becauseâ€¦" I glanced at her eager expression. "That person is dead."

Sen's eyes grew wide.

"And you said before that you were worried that some furies might attack you, right? That there are some frightening groups of people searching for you because of that bottle." Sen interrogated.

"Senâ€¦"

She glared at me.

"Kaori, tell me how this person died." She demanded.

"Enough!" I shouted, bolting upward and tipping over the tray in front of me. Sen gasped, her stern expression evaporated. "I can't! I don't want to tell you or anyone!" I glared at her. "I have to go; I shouldn't even be here. There is some place where I need to be! Thank you for the food but I'm sorry I have to go."

I dashed toward the door. Sen instantly materialized out of the air in front of me holding her arms out.

"I'm sorry too Kaori because I can't let you leave just yet. Please, sit down. I promise I won't ask about your connection with generation X anymore, alright?" She pleaded.

"How did you move over here so quickly?"

"I'm a demon, remember." She winked at me. I felt myself relax. "I didn't mean to upset you." She apologized.

"No, I over reacted."

"You do understand though, why I asked? If that person was killed because of generation X it makes me concerned about your safety. I don't want you to get hurt, which is whyâ€¦"

"Why what?" I blinked, curious.

"Which is why I want Kazama and you to stay together as long as you are searching for the Kouyou Chinbutai." She affirmed. My face froze with shock. "You'll need his protection."

"K-Kazama." I lost my breath for a moment. "That's not possible. Kazama doesn't want to travel with me again."

"Aw, come'on. I bet you haven't even tried to ask him yet."

"I did and he rejected me." I glanced down, ashamed.

"Well do you want to be with him again?"

"Um.." I imagined his words on the ship, _I hate... _"No, I do not. Kazama and I pursue the Kouyou Chinbutai for different reasons and it is rather foolish for us to travel together. Besides he's a demon and I'm a weak and worthless human." I admitted, gritting my teeth.

Sen just stared at me and laughed.

"Whatever you say, Kaori,"

"Hey where is he anyway?"

"He's relaxing right now but I bet he'll be preparing to leave soon. He mentioned something to me earlier that he's going to look for an oni slaying sword of some sort."

"An oni slaying sword?" I tilted my head to the side. I recalled the battle Kazama had with a strange boy in the woods. "Could he be talking about the Douji-giri Yasutsuna?"

"How do you know about that?"

"I heard about it during my travels with Kazama in the woods." I quickly remarked, not wanting to explain the whole story to her.

"Yes, that's the one." She confirmed.

Suddenly there was a knock on the door.

"Princess." Kimigiku called out.

"Come in." Sen ordered. Kimigiku slid the door open and bowed to Sen.

"I'm sorry to bother you but Kazama is requesting your presence outside."

"Alright, thank you. You may leave."

Kimigiku bowed once more before leaving. Sen turned to me.

"Well, let's see what our blonde demon wants." She stuck her tongue at me playfully. We both trotted outside.

As we walked outside onto the patio my body became numb, glancing down at the insatiable sight of Kazama, relaxing with a pipe in one hand. He was wearing a maroon colored sleeping yukata with a dark design on it. His back rested on the wall behind him. One leg was propped up revealing just a taste of his perfect naked body. My face became hot, sweltering with heat even though there was a chilly breeze in the air. It amazed me how at peace Kazama appeared to be. He took a puff out of the pipe. Smoke gracefully caressed his lips that curved into a lecherous grin toward Sen.

"There you are, princess." He spoke in a seditious tone, exaggerating the word princess. "There's something I need to ask you."

"Well, what is it? You're interrupting my time with Kaori." Sen remarked.

"Hn," Kazama's garnet eyes gazed at Sen seductively. "Are you sure you won't become my wife?"

"Eh? Goodness no. We've already been through this. I have no desire to marry you."

"It doesn't seem that way to me." He taunted then inhaled again from the pipe and slowly breathed out the fumes. He smirked at Sen. "Not with the way you were moaning my name just a few moments ago." He teased.

Sen's face became beat-red.

"H-How impolite of you to say such a thing! I didn'tâ€¦" Sen shouted, in dismay. She marched over to Kazama. "I don't recall moaning your name!"

Kazama placed the pipe by his side then grabbed Sen, forcing her on his lap.

"Is that so? I recall it clearly." He continued to tease her.

"Let go and no I most certainly did not!" She pouted in his arms.

I tip-toed a few steps back then wondered away from the two of them. I couldn't stand the site of her in his strong arms, it made me feel sick. I sat down in the middle of Sen's garden.

I began shaking my head forcefully to release the picture of them from my mind.

_I must mean nothing to him, he didn't even acknowledge me. _

A swarm of various emotions engulfed me. Anger, jealousy, and confusion.

"Ugh, I hate this!" I yelped. "Why do I even care about a jerk that abandoned and rejected me!" I debated. It was pointless to travel with him again especially since we both were pursuing different things. I was going to search for the Kouyou Chinbutai and Kazama was going to look for the oni slaying sword.

I rose to my feet. Upon gazing in the distance I decided it was time for me to start my journey to Koufu Castle, regardless of what Sen wanted. As I took a step forward I heard Sen calling my name from behind me.

"Kaori, why'd you run away? What's wrong?" She pestered. I looked away from her. "You're upset with what just happened between me and Kazama, aren't you?" I continued to ignore her. "Do you fancy Kazama?" She provoked.

"Eh?!" My head jerked over in her direction. I felt my cheeks burn from blushing and I scratched the side of my head. Sen's eyes grew wide and a smile lengthened across her face.

"Ah," She began. "You should go tell him."

"Wait, I didn't say anything!" I nervously stuttered.

"Do you want me to tell him?" She offered, turning to go back to Kazama.

"No! Don't tell him!" I yelped then smacked my hand onto my mouth, in regret.

"It's okay, I was only teasing you." She joked, sticking out her tongue. "So it's true isn't it?"

"Wellâ€¦"

"How long have you felt this way toward him?"

"Not for long, I guess."

"Oh, really?" She persisted.

"Hey, how about I make us some tea?" I proposed, trying to avert her attention away from my feelings.

"No thank you, I'm not thirsty butâ€¦" She gave me a playful grin. "I bet Kazama is!" She teased then glanced at the sky. "You know, my ancestors fell in love with humans."

* * *

><p>Demons and humans can fall in love?

* * *

><p>My heart skipped a beat.<p>

Sen continued. "You know since I'm having his child he no longer has a definite reason to pursue Chizuru anymore."

"So,"

"So, that means Kazama can be all yours."

"You're only saying that to encourage me to find a way to travel with Kazama again for protection against those who hunt down the secrets of generation X."

"Oh! You figured it out but seriously I truly feel that you are something special to Kazama. When I first saw you two in the woods I couldn't believe the head of the demonic Kazama clan, associated himself with a human and even protected this human."

We both glanced in Kazama's direction, watching the blonde demon step inside Sen's house.

"I may have been a bit ambitious over the issue but I wasn't bluffing about my ancestors." She confirmed. I still found her claim hard to believe. The possibility of a demon falling in love with a human seemed beyond realistic. "Alright, enough talk. Let's make some tea for Kazama!"

Sen bounced over to my side and nudged me back to the entrance of her residence.

"Sen, what are you doing? I have to get going. I really appreciate your concern for my safety but I just can't push my presence on Kazama anymore than I already have."

"We're here; I'll prepare the water." She cheered, beginning to make some tea.

After the tea was finished Sen gave me a tray to bring to Kazama.

"He is in the room down this hall on the right. I have to get dressed. I'll meet you two in there."

She scurried out of the room. I glanced at the tray debating on whether to serve some to Kazama or not. I decided it was best not to bother since he was only interested in Sen. Still, I couldn't deny how much I had missed him and I wanted to see him once more before I left.

"Darn it." I muffled to myself, heading down the hall with the tray

in my hands.

I announced my presence through the door and asked Kazama if I could enter as politely as I could. When he granted me permission to enter I closed the door behind me. He was standing by a window in his usual clothes with his arms crossed.

"Um, I made you some tea, would you care for some?" I inquired, placing the tray in front of me.

"No."

"Oh." I bowed my head. "So, you're going to search for that oni slaying sword, right? Are you going to leave soon to find it?"

"Did Sen tell you that?" He asked. I nodded my head.

"Um, do you really plan to marry Sen?" I mumbled.

"Why should I tell you? My relationship with her is none of your business. What brought this nonsense up?" He grunted.

"I would just like to congratulate you."

"That's not necessary." He said then glanced out the window. "What about you?"

"Huh?"

"Do you have plans to marry the man that you're searching for?"

"Um, well, maybe, if I ever find him." I mumbled. We were silent again for a several seconds. "Hey, Kazama, do you think I'll find him someday?"

"You shouldn't ask me." He closed his eyes looking irritated.

"Why?"

"Just trust me."

"I do trust you. That's why I asked you."

"Are you sure?" He asked, glancing down at me.

"Yes." I asserted confidently. Kazama looked away from me again.

"The dogs of the Bakufu have no chance of winning this war. Their embarrassing retreat in the battle of Toba-Fushimi is proof of that. If the man you search for stays in the Kouyou Chinbutai, he will surely perish. My answer is no, I don't see you finding him."

I swallowed hard staring at my lap. I felt my shoulders jerk up and down as my vision became blurry. I tried to form words but all that came out of my mouth were sobs. My whole body trembled. Tiny droplets of tears bounced onto my trembling hands, on my lap. Then I heard Kazama sigh.

"Listen, it shouldn't matter to you what I think. As long as you believe he's still alive, keep searching for him. Don't give up." He reassured me with a blank expression.

My head popped up.

"Really?!" I sniffed. Kazama grunted and turned away from me. "Thank you so much, Kazama."

Kazama walked past me, opened the door, and exited the room.

"Are you leaving now?" I asked. He nodded his head and made his way to the entrance of Sen's house. I figured it was time for me to start my journey as well so I followed him.

"Hey! Where are you two going?!" Sen shouted as she scampered over to us. Kazama looked her in the eyes.

"Listen, until I return, I don't want you anywhere near the war." He demanded.

"Please, Kazama, I don't need to hear that from you. I know how to take care of myself." She argued.

"Just don't let me catch you doing something reckless." He chided.

"Okay, I'll agree to that as long you promise to treat Kaori well. Don't be rude to her. I can see there are tears all over her face! What did you do to her?"

Kazama narrowed his eyes.

"Sen, it isn't like that. He didn't do anything. I was just feeling overwhelmed." I explained.

"Alright, if you say so. You're heading out as well?" Sen asked. I nodded. Then she leaned towards me and whispered in my ear.

"So I'm guessing you weren't able to convince Kazama to travel with you again?"

"Yeah, but it's okay. I'll be alright." I whispered back to her.

Sen smirked.

"Hey, Kazama." She called out. "Where is that oni slaying sword said to be located?"

"Koufu Castle." He asserted.

"That's where the Kouyou Chinbutai are!" I smiled with excitement.

Kazama glanced at me then treaded out of Sen's residence. I did the same, trotting close behind him.

"What are you doing?" He inquired, annoyed.

"Why?" I gazed up at him.

"You're following me." He remarked.

"No I'm not, we just happen to be heading toward the same destination." I teased, almost giggling. Kazama paused in his tracks. I spun around, curiously glancing back at him.

"Silly little human," He grunted. "I just can't seem to get rid of you, can I?"

* * *

><p>To Be Continuedâ€|

**Author's note: **

**Happy Holidays everyone :D and thanks for reading! I hope you enjoyed this chapter, and please leave a review! **

13. Preconceptions from the Heart

Author's note:

**I truly appreciate all the reviews I got last chapter. I would like to say thank you to my readers that have kept up with this story thus far. I look forward to your reviews. Also, an extra special thanks to my beta reader, 14Phantom, who I'm always learning something new from. **

I'm sorry for all the frequent late updates. I'll try to update more regularly.

* * *

><p>Back in the Sengoku Period, the Oni was united into ten clans under the leadership of the great Oni, Yase-hime. Sometime around the death of Toyotomi Hideyoshi the humans developed a powerful elixir to compete with the powers of demons. This elixir was referred to as generation X. The legendary monster, created from testing generation X, became the most powerful Rasetsu that ever lived. It even possessed strengths and abilities that surpassed demons. Sometime after transforming, it lost all reason and even began attacking human villages in a lust for blood. All ten heads of the demon clans, a group called the Jukkishuu, came together to fight one fierce battle against this transcendental beast. It took the efforts of all the clans to finally bring it down. It is rumored, that two samples of generation X were lost during the chaos. The humans are currently searching for ways to perfect what they now call the 'Water of Life' in order to re-create an improved version of generation X. The original formula for generation X, however, has been lost since the battle of Sekigahara. Most Oni leaders are speculative about the presence of generation X still lurking in this world since they don't believe any trace of it could possibly be left behind after all these yearsâ€|

* * *

><p>~Kingdom of Stars~

Chapter Thirteen: Preconceptions from the Heart

* * *

><p>"Ahhh! I can't believe this!" I screamed, in a panic.<p>

"What is it?" He grunted, both alert and anxious.

"The, theâ€|" I stuttered, rustling through my clothes. "Where is it?! It was just here!"

"What was?" His red eyes searched me, curiously.

"My bottle! It was tucked into my clothes and now it's missing. I must have dropped it." I cried in distress. "I have to trace my steps back and-"

"Is that it?" He interrupted, angrily. "Forget that useless bottle, do you want to make it to Koufu Castle in time or not?"

"You don't understand. It means so much to me. I have to at least try to find it."

Without thinking, I turned around and dashed back in the direction Kazama and I came from. My eyes scanned the dirt around me as I hastily traced my steps until I noticed something sparkle by a bush. I bolted to the shiny object concealed in the dirt.

I lifted the object into my hands and brushed the dirt off the glass. I sighed in relief upon realizing I had found the bottle. Then I heard some rustling in the woods besides me. I sprang onto my feet and spun around facing a man dressed in dark western clothing. Two garnet beams of light shone from under his head gear. I concealed the bottle in my clothes and glared at the man.

"A fury!" I confirmed.

His nostrils flared. Stupefied and heinous from the desire of blood, he charged at me. I held my stance, unyielding, and prepared to fend him off.

SLASH

A waterfall of blood sprayed out of the furies back as he collapsed. Once the waves of crimson liquid fell to the ground I saw Kazama standing over the fury with his sword in his hands. The fury twitched, trying to stand up. Then Kazama plunged his sword through the furies back, piercing the heart, and killing the fury. Kazama glanced at me.

"You think it's wise to just run away from me like that, do you want to die?" He questioned, growing aggravated. I shook my head. "Hn, fool-"

"Foolish woman, I know , I know." I interrupted, finishing his sentence. "But, look! I found it." I asserted, briefly showing him the bottle.

"Why didn't you move or call for me? Weren't you afraid?" He continued, sheathing his sword.

"Eh? No, not at all." I shrugged. Kazama blinked. I gave him a smile. "We've encountered several furies before. Besides what could I possibly be afraid of when I'm traveling with such a powerful demon?" I added, joyfully. He stared at me with a blank expression. "Kazama? What is it?"

"You humans change so rapidly." He grumbled.

"Huh?"

"Just keep quiet and follow me." He remarked as he advanced down the path.

"Right!"

"Stay close."

"Okay!" I cheered, gleefully trotting behind him.

Kazama and I had been marching in the direction of Koufu Castle on a path in the woods, for most of the day. The sun was starting to set. Our destination this time wasn't far at all. He had told me that this short path would lead us straight to the battle field. Throughout our journey though, he hardly uttered a word to me. The only time he did say something was to remind me to focus or stay close to him.

A gentle breeze chilled through the air causing me to cough turbulently into my hands.

"Ahh-cho!" I sneezed, forcefully as I inhaled the dust blown in from the wind. I placed my shaky hands on my mouth. Kazama didn't seem bothered at all from the light wind. I leaped forward once to get closer to him. A sudden uproar within me caused me to halt in my tracks.

"Ahh-choo!" Another sneeze pierced through my lips. My eyes watered and my cheeks felt very warm. Kazama had stopped walking to glance back at me.

"I'm fine." I sniffed.

His eyes studied me then he continued down the path. I treaded close behind him. My mind began to wonder. I pondered over what Sen had told me about her ancestors; that they had fallen in love with humans.

If it was possible for demons and humans to fall in love maybe someday Kazama and Iâ€¦

* * *

><p>Nah, who am I kidding?

* * *

><p>What if Sen was being serious when she said that Kazama could be all mine since he no longer has a definite reason to pursue Chizuru anymore and even Sen, herself, refuses to marry him. Was it even possible for a demon like kazama to care for a human, like myself?

Perhaps Kazama did care about me since he let me travel with him again and he came back to rescue me. In fact, Kazama had saved my life several times. So could that mean that he had grown to care for me? I felt a smile crease across my face at the thought.

I kept my eyes on his back as he treaded onward, toward our destination. I wanted to ask him if he believes demons and humans could care for one another until my eyes fell onto his sword and I suddenly became curious over another matter.

"Hey, Kazama, may I ask why are you trying to get that oni slaying sword?"

"To fight that man in the Kouyou Chinbutai." He remarked without looking back.

"But why do you want to fight him so badly?"

"I gave my word that we would settle the score and demons always keep their word." He asserted, beginning to sound annoyed.

"But why would you be fighting him in the first place?" I inquired, skipping closer to him. He ignored me. I grew frustrated with his unresponsive behavior. "Is it because Chizuru, a demon, follows him?" I sneered, almost taunting him. Kazama spun around and faced me in the blink of an eye.

"I don't understand why you enjoy prying into my business all the time." He growled.

"Um, I don't mean to pry; I just want to find a way to help if I could." I wondered if it was the mentioning of Chizuru's name that caused him to responded to me or if I was actually right.

"The Shinsengumi are nothing but a bunch of incompetent warriors; I don't like that a demon stays with them. Humans only know how to betray those they care about."

"Maybe it's possible for humans and demons to care for one another or even fall in love and perhaps that's why she stays with him." I argued.

"That shouldn't happen. Demons and humans are too different from one another." He chuckled, giving me a disgusted look. "That idea is so absurd. He will betray her one day. She's so pathetic for staying with those humans; it's actually humorous.;

"Well, if they want to be together, don't you think it's wrong to condemn them just because she has oni blood and wants to be with a human?!" I stuttered.

"I don't expect a lowly human to understand."

"But, I thought that you care forâ€|" I blushed and turned around. I heard Kazama stepping toward me and I struggled to hide my red face from him.

"Hn...so this outburst of yours; it wasn't about Chizuru at all." He grumbled beside me.

"Huh?" My head popped up toward Kazama. He grinned then turned away from me.

"Hn, women." He grunted as he began venturing forward.

"Kazama?" I blinked then skipped toward him.

I bowed my head and kept quiet as we continued to tread down the path to Koufu Castle.

Bang!

The ear splitting boom of a gun pierced through the calm air, in front of us. I saw birds flying upward from bushes, escaping the menacing cry of bullets.

Kazama turned towards me and observed my face for several long seconds.

"Go back to Sen." He ordered.

"What?!" I gasped. "No, I-"

"Look at yourself."

"Huh?" I just realized I was shaking. My knees trembled and sweat dripped off my face.

"You're scared." He confirmed. "We'll be entering a battlefield. It's too much for a young girl, much less a human girl." He turned and started walking away from me.

"I'm not scared! You know I have to find the Kouyou Chinbutai and going to Koufu Castle is my only option. I'm going, with or without you!" I panicked.

Kazama took a few steps then paused, without looking back. The rays of the sun gracefully illuminated around his figure while slowly setting onto the horizon.

"I won't go directly into the battle field." I continued. "I'll just wait until they successfully win the battle and seized Koufu Castle then I'll make my move."

"Enough," Kazama interrupted. "The Kouyou Chinbutai's enemy has already seized Koufu Castle. They stand no chance against the imperial army. The Kouyou Chinbutai will lose this battle." He sneered bitterly. "They will be crushed like the vermin they are." He mocked.

"Their enemy already seized the castle?! How do you know that?"

"I was informed about the movements of the imperial army back at Sen's residence. It's obvious that they have already taken Koufu Castle by now, which is why you should return to Sen's residence. Besides, if anything happened to you Sen would never let me hear the end of it."

"I don't care! Don't underestimate the brave men of the Kouyou Chinbutai. They will win this battle for sure and I want to be there

when that happens." I boldly shouted.

Bang!

A beam of wind gushed through the side of my face like a flash of lightning. My hair waved forcefully around my head. I turned around and saw a bullet hole in a tree directly behind me. I gasped realizing that whoever was firing those guns were shooting at us and almost shot me in the head. Kazama instantly materialized in front of me with his sword drawn.

"Kazama!" I cried.

"Go now." He demanded harshly.

"No! I already told you, I'm going to Koufu Castle." I shouted. A group of soldiers with western weapons marched down toward us from a hill a distance away. "Please, let me help you get that sword you want."

"You'll only get in my way if you stay. Why would you even assist someone who is enemies with the man you're searching for?"

"Because that person is my friend and I care about him!" I huffed then bolted in front of Kazama.

"Hey!" I called out to the soldiers. "Please don't shoot at us! We are just passing by."

_Bam! Bam! _

I screamed and shut my eyes from the screeching sound of bullets.

Clink

I peeked open and saw Kazama standing in front of me, using his sword as a shield from the bullets.

"Why aren't they listening?" I mumbled.

"They can't they're mindless furies." Kazama asserted.

"Wait, are they from the pro-imperialist faction?!" I yelped. "Oh no, the Kouyou Chinbutai; they're up against furies?!"

BAM!

"They're up against a superior army." He remarked.

One of the fury soldiers fired his gun directly at Kazama as he swiftly drew his sword to deflect the bullet.

Snap!

At that moment a piece of Kazama's sword broke off and a crack appeared on the steel. His eyes narrowed.

"Get down." He ordered.

"Okay."

The soldiers charged toward us. Kazama manifested in front of them and sliced his sword through their hearts swiftly and they all fell on the ground, dead. I dashed to Kazama's side and glanced at his sword.

"Damn." He grunted glaring at his cracked sword. It looked like it would break apart any second. His eyes fell on me for a moment. Then he sighed, sheathed his sword and advanced toward the woods off the path.

"There's a small village not far from here. It's another way to get to Koufu Castle. I doubt whoever is keeping the oni slaying sword, the Douji-giri Yasutsuna, at that castle will just hand it over, so I'll need a new one before I pursue my ambition and," He paused briefly observing me. "It's safer for you since we won't encounter any imperial soldiers in the village."

"Alright, I'm with you every step of the way." I chirped.

We treaded through the ominous dark woods for several minutes in search of this village. When the sun buried itself beneath the skyline, our path was once again lighted by the stars that reached their light out to us, from above the heavens. I became mesmerized by Kazama's star in the sky. I smiled, unable to keep my eyes off that star. I suddenly felt myself get excited and resisted the urge to bother Kazama with my discovery.

"Watch where you are going." Kazama reminded me, growing curious over my joyful demeanor.

"Right." I reassured him, trying to focus. My eyes wondered again to that star. When we passed under some tall trees, I galloped around searching for the light of the star from the thick dark branches that blocked my view. I eventually lost sight of it and sighed. Kazama turned his head slightly back at me.

When it reappeared I hopped with glee and debated whether it really was the same star that Kazama had pointed out to me on that life boat. When I glance back down I could see nothing but blackness and realized I had lost sight of Kazama. I thrashed forward.

"Kaza-AH!" I yelped when my collar was suddenly pulled back from behind me causing me to almost choke.

"I thought I told you to stay close." Kazama growled as he let go of me. I spun around and looked up at his irritated expression then we both continued to march toward the village.

No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't keep my gaze off the sky, searching for that star. It reminded me of the first time Kazama was ever kind to me. I imagined myself resting on his side while he spoke gently down to me. That memory led me to believe that Kazama, a demon, could really have cared about me, a human girl. Suddenly, I blindly felt my body slam into something.

"Ouch!" I moaned then noticed that I had bumped into Kazama.

"Alright, what is it?" He grunted.

"Eh?! Well um, look!" I stuttered, pointing my arm across Kazama's face at a star in the sky. "It's beautiful isn't it?" Kazama kept his eyes on my face and without paying any attention to the sky then he began walking ahead of me. I pouted while catching up to him. "Don't you remember?" I questioned.

"Hn?"

"This is the same star that you showed me right?"

"What are you talking about?"

"You know, back on that life boat you used this star to get us to Edoâ€¦"

Kazama paused in this tracks to glance up at the night sky.

"Yeah. What of it? We're not going to Edo."

"I just thought it was really pretty and got excited when I saw it again."

"Don't ponder over such needless things." He lectured.

"I'm sorry." I mumbled.

After sometime, Kazama and I stumbled onto the entrance of the small village. I yawned and stretched, relieved. Suddenly I saw something dripping off my forehead and realized that I hadn't stopped sweating from when those soldiers attacked us and my face was hot despite the chilly breeze that crept around in the absence of the sun. I paused to observe myself.

"Come on." Kazama ordered.

"Okay, I'm come-" My words were interrupted by a gagging cough that hacked out of my throat. "I'm." I sniffed. "Coming!" I called out limping over to him.

His mouth opened slightly as he observed me.

"What's wrong?" He inquired.

"I'm okay. We made it." I smiled at him, kindly.

Kazama and I then ventured into the village. A haunting gust in the wind gave me an eerie sensation. The streets were completely vacant and none of the houses were lit. Amid the sense of danger and ambiguity a foreboding ache clawed at my gut.

"The sun just set a moment ago. So, where is all the people?" I asked, scanning the lifeless area.

A gloomy fog brushed on the streets and the moon shone with a sickly purple tint. A roaring wind pierced through the air and lashed out at us, accompanied by a sinister and unfriendly howl. I bolted into Kazama's back and tightly gripped his clothes with one hand as we treaded through the streets. He didn't pay any attention to my

actions.

"Um, Kazama, I think something is off about this place." I whimpered. Kazama placed his hand on his sword then halted abruptly and spoke.

"I'm feeling it to."

* * *

><p>To Be Continuedâ€|

**Author's note: **

It is your reviews that keep me going. So please leave one; they make my day!

14. Village of Nightmares

**Author's note: **

So, my computer had an annoying virus for some time which really sucked since I couldn't get on my laptop that often. Sorry for the delay everyone but now I'm back!

**Zhera and Ainhoall, I'm so glad to hear that you think the story is getting better and better, I hope I can live up to your expectations. **

**Lily, haha you have a hunch? Keep reading to see if your guess is correct. **

By the way everyone, my beta reader 14Phantom is so awesome! That's all I have to say for right now, let's read!

* * *

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"I'm feeling it to."

* * *

><p>~Kingdom of Stars~

Chapter Fourteen: Village of Nightmares

* * *

><p>Kazama and I stood completely still, waiting silently. The streets were painted with shadows. A light breeze swooped over our path, weeping throughout the village.<p>

"Damn, I thought this route would be safer for you." Kazama grunted.

I stared at his back. His hair waved slightly with the wind.

Crash

Suddenly, the sound of something tipping over echoed in the distance. I felt my hand grip tighter onto Kazama's clothes. We both glanced in the direction of the noise and saw a bucket rolling down the side of the street. I forced myself to let go of Kazama's back, trying to be brave. Suddenly a cat dived out of an ally way and dashed across the street. I sighed in relief that the source of the noise was just a harmless cat but Kazama didn't lose focus.

"I was scared for a moment there. I thought we were going to be attacked-" I uttered.

"Quiet." He ordered, planting his feet in a fighting stance.
"Something's coming." He warned.

"What is?" I nervously asked spinning around.

A thunderous blast of wind engulfed around me. Wisps of my hair twisted around my head in every direction. Suddenly I heard a deep groan from above me. My gaze shot upward. Two glowing red lights surrounded by a dark cloud flew down towards me. I leapt backwards avoiding the creature's crash landing on the dirt in front of me. A powerful wind circled around its feet. I assumed the beast was a fury until I glanced at its uncanny features.

The creature wheezed heavily, drool pouring out from its jaw onto the dirt. It had a hunched back and silvery skin covered with wrinkles and spikey ears. My body froze, stunned.

"Get back." Kazama ordered, shoving me to the side. He glared at the beast for a moment until it leapt at him with its mouth opened wide. All of its teeth were sharp fangs like the jaw of a shark. Kazama whipped out his sword and slashed the monsters chest open. My feet staggered a few steps back, trying to not be in the way. I heard an insidious growl and glanced up at the rooftop of a building and spotted another one of those creatures standing above Kazama.

"Kazama, above you!" I shouted.

Kazama kicked the creature in front of him causing it to tumble down on the street before he darted to the side avoiding the attack of the

other creature as it flew down to him from the roof. Kazama swung his sword repeatedly at the beast that swiftly dodged each attack until it bumped into a wall of a building. Kazama lifted his sword over his head and motioned to chop the beast in half. The creature caught Kazama's blade right before it touched it's ash like skin.

"What are they?" I winced.

I saw the creature Kazama previously cut down lurk towards Kazama from behind and prepared to strike while his sword remained caught in the other monster's grasp. When it lashed out to attack Kazama I tugged off my sandal and hurled it across the street hitting the beast on the side of its head, knocking it down on the ground by Kazama's feet. Kazama kicked the creature's side that was holding his sword, making it let go of his blade. Skillfully, he drilled the sword through the fiend's chest, puncturing its heart in a parallel strike. It let out an earsplitting howl as it collapsed to the dirt; dead. Kazama glanced at my sandal then at me briefly. I nodded my head at him. He prepared to fight the other monster that staggered to its feet. When three pairs of glowing red eyes illuminated from the darkness besides Kazama.

"How many of them are there?" I whimpered.

I felt something grab my arm from behind me and was unexpectedly was forced to stumble backwards and shut my eyes, afraid of gazing directly at one of the savage fiends.

"Ah! Let go!" I pleaded.

"Shh! It's alright." A soothing male voice asserted as I was dragged through the street.

"Huh?" I blinked my eyes open.

"Come on. We have to get off the streets before one of those monsters catch us," the voice continued.

I realized I was being pulled away from the battle by a young man with shoulder length black hair tied in a ponytail.

"Wait, who are you? Where are you taking me?" I questioned, losing my breath.

"My name is Hiroshi and I'm taking you to a safe location." He confirmed. "What's a pretty girl, like yourself, doing in a place like this anyway?"

"What about Kazama?"

"You mean that friend of yours back there? Forget about him. Trust me, no one can fight these monsters, he's probably already dead."

"No!" I planted my foot into the ground and tugged my arm toward my chest struggling to break free from his grip. "I'm not leaving him. Besides, those monsters aren't any match for him."

"You don't understand, these things aren't human." He argued, staring into my eyes. I realized his were a light blue color.

"And I'm telling you, that doesn't make a difference. You don't know Kazama like I do. They don't stand a chance against him." I debated, thrashing my arm free from his grasp.

"Wait!" He yelped, lunging toward me. He gripped onto my arm again and pulled me to him. "I mean no offense but if we're going to survive we have to leave him behind and escape while we still have a chance."

"Let go of her." An angry voice demanded.

I glanced over my shoulder at Kazama who was approaching us with his bloody sword in his hand. It appeared to have more cracks on it than before. I saw five dead bodies of the monsters on the street in the distance and there didn't seem to be any left pursuing us. The man continued to grip my arm, refusing to obey Kazama's order.

"You must really want to die." Kazama viciously sneered.

"Wait! He wasn't trying to hurt me or anythingâ€¦" I blurted out towards Kazama.

"Hey, loosen up! I'm only trying to protect her-" the man bickered, glaring at Kazama.

"She is none of your concern." Kazama criticized.

Hiroshi studied both of us for a few seconds then let go of my arm. I took a step towards Kazama.

"You okay?" He asked.

"Yeah." I nodded.

"Here." Kazama handed me my sandal. I slipped it back on.

"Hiroshi!" The voice of an elderly man called out.

A crowd of people raced toward us from down the street. Some carried lanterns and planks of wood as weapons.

"Look! Some of those horrible monsters have been defeated!" One of the people hollered.

"Who are they, Hiroshi?" A person in the crowd asked.

"Hiroshi, what happened? Who defeated those beasts?" The old man inquired, staring at Hiroshi.

"This guyâ€¦" Hiroshi snickered. "He defeated them." He said giving Kazama a hostile look. The villagers instantly began to cheer amongst themselves.

"I can't believe it! Finally we've found someone who stands a fighting chance against those monsters!"

"He must have come to save our village!"

"Let's prepare a feast for this man!"

"Hooray! We're saved!"

The old man stepped towards Kazama.

"Thank you so much. You've done us a great service by getting rid of some of those awful beasts. I'm afraid more of them are still lurking in our streets. Will you stay and defeat the rest of them and save our people from this nightmare that plagues our village?" He pleaded.

"I have no interest in helping any of you. We're just passing by." Kazama asserted.

"What do you mean you have no interest in helping us?!" Hiroshi shouted. "You're the first warrior we've seen in a long time and the first person who was able to even defeat one of those things! You have to stay and help us!" Kazama didn't pay any attention to Hiroshi's plea. Hiroshi glared hatefully at him.

"Hiroshi, that's enough." The old man lectured then turned his gaze toward Kazama's sword. "I see your sword is badly cracked."

"Know where I can find a new one?" Kazama asked.

"All of our swords were stolen recently but there is one we could give you. My son is a blacksmith and he went to go finish a sword at another village. He should be returning sometime tomorrow with the sword. We'll give you the sword if you stay."

"I already gave you my answer." Kazama grunted.

"Would you at least stay for the girl then?"

"Hn?" Kazama glanced down at me.

"Kazama!" I sniffed holding onto my throat. My head became extremely heavy and hot. Kazama narrowed his eyes, annoyed. I sneezed into my hands then gagged into a coughing fit.

"She seems gravely ill and will need some medicine and a full night's rest; if she's ever going to recover." The old man remarked.

"I'm not making any deals, old man." Kazama declared.

"I know, I'm just offering our hospitality. You've already killed some of those monsters for us, it's the least we can do for you in return."

"You're crazy!" Hiroshi squealed. "Just let him go, he's not willing to help us anyway."

"Hey." I mumbled. Hiroshi's gaze shot down at me in surprised, as if he just remembered I was there. "I really don't want to be a bother to everyone but I think it's best if you let us leave. We're in a hurry to get somewhere and-" I choked and shook violently as sweat dripped off my face.

"We'll stay." Kazama grumbled.

"What?!" I gasped.

"Just for tonight." Kazama confirmed, glancing down at me.

"Follow us, we'll show you where we are hiding." The old man instructed then turned to Hiroshi. "Hiroshi, keep a look out and make sure none of those creatures are tracking us." Hiroshi nodded.

After some time the villagers guided us into a large room in a safe house.

"Everyone here is all that's left of our community, there are no other survivors." The old man murmured to Kazama who didn't seem interested.

"So you're saying that those creatures killed most of the people in this village?" I asked.

"That's right." Hiroshi answered. "There's twelve of them, minus the five that he killed." He briefly jerked his head towards Kazama. "And they seem to have an uncontrollable hunger for blood."

"Why won't you all leave this place then?" I inquired.

"We can't leave our homes and everything we own." Hiroshi argued. "So we've been waiting for a warrior to come and save us." Hiroshi glanced at Kazama who wasn't even paying any attention to anyone.

"I'm so sorry that this happened to you all, I wish there was something I could do for you." I sighed. Hiroshi smiled at me.

"Don't worry about it. I appreciate your concern for us but I just want you to focus on getting better, okay?" Hiroshi said, patting my head then he sighed heavily. "Why has this happened to our people, it's all because of that bastard Kodo Yukimura."

Kazama's gaze immediately shot towards Hiroshi.

"Kodo Yukimura?" He grunted.

"He's the one that started all of this." Hiroshi asserted.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Some time ago a small army dressed in western clothes passed through here and demanded that we let them stay in our homes during the day time. Their leader was an old man named Kodo Yukimura and he introduced himself to the men of our village. Ever since he showed up people have begun to vanish mysteriously. He seemed to be experimenting with some potion. He eventually persuaded a dozen men to drink this strange liquid out of a small bottle, promising powers and rewards to those who drank it. He even offered it to me but I refused; it just didn't look safe to drink." Hiroshi explained.

"Hey, did the bottles look like this." I questioned, pulling out the generation X bottle from my clothes. Kazama glared at me.

"Yes! It looked exactlyâ€¦|wait what is that mark? Is it an X?" Hiroshi stuttered.

"Oh, yeah." I mumbled, feeling Kazama's spiteful eyes on me. I quickly concealed the bottle in my garments, responding to Kazama's vexed demeanor.

"The liquid was black and ink-like. I can't believe some people even drank the stuff. Anyway, Kodo Yukimura kept on talking about how he wanted his men to be able to walk and operate in the sunlight, whatever that met. The first person that drank this stuff immediately transformed into a very powerful being, though he still looked human. Just his eyes and hair changed color. He suddenly was able to jump over ten feet in the air. Everyone was impressed and wanted some of the elixir for themselves. A total of twelve men drank this potion and obtained the same powers and were able to roam in the daylight butâ€¦|"

"Go on." Kazama urged.

Hiroshi glanced at him silently.

"Tell us what happened next." I pleaded.

"Everything seemed to be fine until some kid fell and scraped his knee on the street and at that moment the clouds blocked the sun." Hiroshi began turning to me. "Right after that, all twelve men suddenly went under another transformation; a more horrifying and powerful one than before. Their backs became hunched and their skin turned grey and all of their teeth sharpened. It was disgusting. Soon the village was overrun by these blood sucking beasts. Only a few survived the blood bath. However, once the sun shined through the clouds the monsters vanished. They seem to only come out when the rays of the sun are blocked."

"Just as I suspected; these things are merely deformed furies, failures. What happened to Kodo Yukimura?" Kazama inquired.

"He and his army vanished. No one knows where he went." Hiroshi remarked.

"But why would he make these monsters." I uttered.

"Well he did mention something about restoring a Yukimura clan and making some kind of advanced human race or a new world of devils. The guy was nuts." Hiroshi sighed.

"A new world of devils?" Kazama snickered. "So, that rat decided to betray demon kind, how blasphemous. How dare he tarnish the Yukimura name." He growled to himself. I glanced over at him, not having a clue of what he was saying.

"By the way, what is your name?" Hiroshi asked, leaning in close to me.

"It's Kaori." I affirmed.

"Kaori! What a beautiful name. What brings you here?" Hiroshi stuttered.

"That is none of your business." Kazama growled. "Your people said you have medicine. Quit wasting her time and give her the medicine." He chided.

"What!" Hiroshi stuttered, clenching his fist.

A man suddenly shoved Hiroshi to the side.

"Please, Hiroshi, don't start an argument with the great warrior." He said.

"Great warrior?" I mumbled.

The man knelt down beside me and handed me some medicine off a tray he was holding.

"Here take this and you'll feel better in no time." He smiled at me.

"Thank you!" I chirped, bowing to him.

The man then turned to Kazama and bowed.

"Great Warrior Kazama, we have prepared two rooms for you. Please follow me." He asserted, beginning to guide us down a hall.

"Kaori, sleep well!" Hiroshi called out to me.

"Okay, thank you." I hollered back at Hiroshi.

We were directed down a hallway with two rooms on the left side.

"We didn't know if you two were lovers or not so we prepared two rooms for you. The room down the hall is for the girl." Our guide instructed. "Have a nice rest." He bowed to Kazama then treaded out of the hallway. Kazama and I were alone together again.

I glanced up at his face and waited for a moment for him to say something but he just gave me a blank look.

"Good night." I shrugged, advancing down the hall toward the room. I felt his crimson eyes on me. I glanced over my shoulder at him and watched him step in front of the entrance of his room. I suddenly felt a little awkward since Kazama wasn't saying anything. I sighed then opened the sliding door to my room.

"Hey," Kazama grunted. I spun around and faced him.

"Yes!" I cheered.

"Why didn't you tell me you were feeling ill?"

"Umâ€¦"

"Do you want to slow me down?" He questioned.

"No! Never!" I asserted, feeling a bit guilty.

"I should have forced you to go back to Sen's." He scolded.

"I'm fine! Don't worry; it's just a small cold. I'll be ready to go to Koufu Castle as soon as we are able tomorrow." I argued then coughed into my hands.

"Do you take me for a fool?" He growled.

"No! Of course not!"

"You look so pathetic. Hn, it amazes me how you weak humans never fail to prove just how worthless you all are." He criticized, opening the door to his room. "If you don't recover in time tomorrow, I'm leaving you behind."

"What?!" I gasped. "Youâ€|Kazama you would really leave me in a place like this?" I cried, heartbroken.

"You should have gone back to Sen's residence when you had the chance. If you perish here you'll have your own foolishness to blame for not listening to me." He lectured then entered his room and shut the door behind him.

"But Kazamaâ€|I thought you were finally," I coughed. "â€|my friend."

I pouted for a moment then staggered into the room and shut the door behind me. There was a sleeping yukata beside the bed. I changed quickly and crawled under the covers. Kazama's hurtful voice rang through my consciousness as I slowly began drifting to sleep.

"_I'm leaving you behindâ€|If you perish here you'll have your own foolishness to blame." _

I pulled the covers up to my face. My body cringed as I gagged countless times. My face was sweltering with heat, my cheeks felt like they were on fire. I tried to resist the urge to cough and tears spilled from the corners of my eyes from the intense pressure. I turned around a couple of times trying to get comfortable, until I had no strength to move. My last thoughts were of the demon sleeping in the room next to me.

Kazama, would you really leave me in a place like this where I could get eaten by monsters? Do you still hate me?

* * *

><p>The whole world was dark except for two small holes my eyes were looking through. I was shivering on an empty field outside under the night sky. I felt something heavy weighing my face down. When I lifted my hands to touch my cheeks I felt a cold rough surface of something other than my skin. My hands traced the object on my face to the back of my head where I found the ribbon that bound this thing to my head. I quickly united it and the heavy thing on my face clanked onto the grass.<p>

"What is this thing?!" I yelped.

I knelt down beside the object and turned it around and immediately threw myself backwards from the remembrance of a ghoul from a previous nightmare. The object was the same pale pink mask of a devil's face the child in my nightmares wore. I wondered why it was

confined to my face before an uproarious twister swarmed throughout the field. When the storm passed I saw a giant about ten feet tall with long white hair and glowing blood red eyes standing a distance away from me. At its feet were ten men dressed in blue haori coats.

"The Shinsengumi?!" I screeched then recalled Sen's words.

"_All ten heads of the demon clans, a group called the Jukkishuu, came together to fight one fierce battle against this transcendental beast. It took the efforts of all the clans to finally bring it down."_

"Get out of there! Don't fight it!" I hollered at the men.

"What an ugly bastard." One of the men joked.

"You could say that again." The shortest Shinsengumi warrior said.

"No! Run away!" I warned.

My eyes grew wide at the sight of a warrior pulling his sword from its sheath with his left hand. He then charged at the beast with no hesitation followed by a man with a spear. The giant Rasetsu lifted its sword and swung down toward the ten captains of the Shinsengumi, slicing through each one. I croaked in horror as their blood sprayed out from their necks and lost limbs.

"No!" I cried shutting my eyes and hugging myself tightly. I wanted to run but felt too afraid to move. I peeked at the gruesome scene through teary eyes. "So, is thisâ€¦" I trembled. "The generation X Rasetsu?"

"Fake dog." Grunted a deep and erotic voice.

"Kazama!" I gasped as he manifested in front of me on the field. I almost felt relieved for a moment until Sen's revelation crept into my mind.

"_This legendary monster was the most powerful Rasetsu ever created and it even possessed strengths and abilities that surpassed the average demon."_

"Kazama, no! I think this fury is the generation X monster from history. We have to run!" I begged as he lowered himself into a fighting stance.

Kazama charged in for the kill. Right before he was able to pierce the heart of the beast it grabbed his face with one of its huge hands then drew its sword straight through Kazama's heart. The generation X monster tossed Kazama's lifeless corpse onto the grass and advanced toward me. I shook violently from the sight.

"Kazama!" I cried in pure agony.

I collapsed to my knees as the monster's shadow towered over me under the sickly amethyst light of the moon. I heard a metallic noise in front of me and realized the Rasetsu dropped its sword on the grass besides me.

"Split your gut." It ordered in a roaring tone. "You were the one who was supposed to die."

Haunted by guilt, I clenched the handle of the steel in front of me.

"I know." My voice cracked. "I'm so sorry!"

* * *

><p>My eyes sprang open as I threw the covers off my body and placed my hands on my abdomen.<p>

"Itâ€|was only a dream." I whispered.

I rested my hand on the side of the bed then felt something wet tickle the tips of my fingers. I glanced around and noticed that my bed was damp with sweat. I pressed my hand against my forehead and realized my fever had gone down.

I wondered how long I slept since it was still night. Suddenly I heard a howl from outside my window and tugged the covers over my head, terrified. I imagined the monster from my nightmare standing in my room and became frustrated with fear. Haunting images of those deformed furies free in the streets penetrated my thoughts causing me to lose tranquility and enter a very anxious and paranoid state.

I was afraid of the mystery behind generation X; the incubus in my head; the dangerous furies outside; and most of all, being alone to face such horrors. I struggled to comfort myself but my efforts were wasted because of how pessimistic I was.

What if one of those monsters outside try to get me while I'm sleeping by myself?

_What if I have another nightmare with that evil fiend again? _

I lifted the covers from my face and scanned the room. Every shadow was a place where those furies could be hiding and every noise sounded like them drawing closer and closer to feast on my flesh. Then my mind played a cruel trick on me. I turned my head to the side and thought I saw that mask of a devil's face on the floor beside my head. I thrashed around in my covers before realizing that the mask was actually my kimono neatly folded beside my bed.

"I'm scared." I whimpered. That's when I realized how much I hated being alone with these fears and anxieties and pondered on what to do to free myself from them.

"Kazamaâ€|" I mumbled. "I could go to your room," I blushed just thinking about it. I wondered if he would even let me share a room with him and if he was fast asleep already. One thing was for sure, I couldn't stand another minute in the room I was in. I stumbled to my feet and cautiously opened the siding door to my room and glanced down the hall. I was intimidated to step out of the room for a moment, being overly suspicious of my own safety. I eventually tip toed out of the room and then dashed to the entrance of Kazama's room. I blindly studded my toe against the hard floor on the way to the door.

"Ouch!" I squeaked, standing in front of his door.

The air in the hallway had an eerie silence that made me shiver. I hesitated to open the door for several seconds.

_Would it be okay if I just snuck in there? Is he already asleep?

_

I ran over scenarios in my mind over his possible reactions to my presence in his room. I sighed heavily holding onto my shaky body. I was afraid going in his room unannounced would anger him and I was even more fearful of waking the blonde demon up. Most of all I was scared that my actions would cause him to leave me.

"_You look so pathetic. Hn, it amazes me how you weak humans never fail to prove just how worthless you all are." _

I leaned my body against the entrance to his room. My left cheek pressed against the door as my ears tried to capture a sign of his presence inside, wondering if he was awake. I closed my eyes after sometime, and recollected my time with Kazama, fearing the end of our alliance.

I desperately didn't want to be separated from Kazama, to face the cold ominous world alone. I began to weep hysterically. I heard Kazama let out a big sigh.

_"Do not disobey me again." Kazama said. _

"Do you mean," I sniffed. "I can...?"

"We shouldn't waste any more time, the boat is leaving soon." He turned from me and began advancing down the street.

Even though to him I was just a burden, that he couldn't seem to break free from, he was to me, my solace and comfort. I had no idea what to expect from our travels through the vast ocean but we embarked on this new adventure, together.

A smile stretched across my tired face and at that moment I yearned for him with a great voracity to have his protection, guidance, and comfort. As I leaned on the door collecting these thoughts brought ease and amenity to my apprehensive self. I was finally able to relax.

"What are you doing?" Kazama grunted from inside the room. My eyes sprang open as he suddenly opened the sliding door I was leaning against. I lost my balance and fell into the chest I once slept safely and peacefully on, under the stars.

* * *

><p>To Be Continuedâ€|

**I find it hard to continue this story without your support so please leave a quick review before you go! Thanks for reading!
**

15. A Demon's Protection

****Author's Note: ****

****Thank you for your reviews on my last chapter! ****

****Zhera, haha that is so true!****

****Ainhoa11, keep reading, there's more twists to come! ****

****Lily, thank you! I'll try my hardest!****

****Unknowns, you guys are awesome!****

****I hope you all will enjoy this one! Please don't forget to leave a review for me. I'll appreciate it more than anything!****

****By the way everyone, have I mentioned that I have a beta-reader, 14Phantom?****

*** * ***

><p>I leaned my body against the entrance to his room. My left cheek pressed against the door as my ears tried to capture a sign of his presence inside, wondering if he was awake. I closed my eyes after sometime, and recollected my time with Kazama, fearing the end of our alliance.<p>

A smile stretched across my tired face and at that moment I yearned for him with a great voracity to have his protection, guidance, and comfort. As I leaned on the door collecting these thoughts brought ease and amenity to my apprehensive self. I was finally able to relax.

"What are you doing?" Kazama grunted from inside the room. My eyes sprang open as he suddenly opened the sliding door I was leaning against. I lost my balance and fell into the chest I once slept safely and peacefully on, under the stars.

*** * ***

><p>~Kingdom of Stars~

Chapter Fifteen: A Demon's Protection

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><p>My face was consumed with warmth and my body, with alleviation as I melted into his impervious chest; free from harm. His hands tickled as he placed them on my back, giving my fatigued body support. I wheezed heavily into his chest, fighting nausea. He was dressed in his usual attire without his coat.<p>

"You miserable thing," Kazama grunted.

I peeked up at his spiteful ruby eyes as they observed me, puzzled. My eyes steamed as tears swelled up from the heat on my face. I hid myself in his chest, averting his unwelcoming gaze.

"Kazama! they're in my room, the hallways, the shadows!" I whimpered. "They have fangs, and claws, and reek of death!"

"Hn?"

"I'm so scared." I whispered, recalling the evil from my nightmares and of all the fiends I had encountered on this journey.

"There's nothing in this hallway." He grumbled, sighing heavily. "Humans can be so paranoid."

"I'm afraid one of those things outside is going to get me!" I sniffed.

"You know I won't let that happen." Kazama remarked, sounding annoyed. "You won't get any better without sleep. Bring your things in here." He asserted, pushing me away from him.

My body trembled as he let go of me. I was too horrified and disorientated to move. He glared down at me, looking peeved over my inability to follow his orders.

"But!" I squeaked. My bottom lip shook.

"How long are you going to rely on my protection?" He chided.

"I'm sorry." I lowered my head, with guilt.

He walked passed me and into the hallway. After a few seconds he returned with my things in his arms and shoved them into my hands. I staggered to the floor and set up my bedding a distance away from his bed. I felt terrible that he always had to take care of me.

I crawled under my covers and watched Kazama as he pulled his blanket over his shoulder and turned away from me in his bed. I kept my eyes on his back.

"Um!" I began.

"Whatever it is, it can wait until morning." He grunted. "You've pestered me enough for one night."

I hugged myself under the covers, wrapped around my body. My eyelids slowly shut as all my strength evaporated but for some reason, I couldn't fall asleep. I laid there for quite some time until I felt a very faint itch on my leg as if something was loitering on me and ignored it for a while until I became curious enough to investigate. I rubbed my eyes before lifting the blanket up and glancing down the sheets. I saw a small bent finger tap my upper leg then focused my gaze. I froze as I noticed several dark legs around a plump figure lurking up my body, crawling closer to my face.

"Spider!" I confirmed, thrashing my legs up and down. I threw the blanket completely off of me and scooted backwards against a wall. The spider raced around my bed in circles then charged under the blanket, disappearing from my sight. I waited for several minutes for the spider to reappear but it didn't. I glanced at Kazama who hadn't moved an inch from the last time I checked on him. I scampered over to his side.

"Kazama?" I whispered but got no response from the sleeping Demon Lord. Exhausted I became very inept and raised Kazama's blankets and tucked myself under them, hoping somehow Kazama wouldn't notice my presence. I yawned and stretched and as I did my leg bumped into the back of his. I yelped and jerked leg away from his. I turned on my side, facing away from him so I could keep an eye on my bed to see if that spider was going to crawl out from underneath my covers so I wouldn't have to risk sharing a bed with Kazama.

Some time elapsed and I almost fell asleep before I felt my shoulder being grabbed then pinned to the bed forcing me to turn on my back.

"What are you doing?" Kazama growled, frustrated.

"Ahh!" I screamed as my eyes shot up towards Kazama's irritated face.

"There's a spider in my bed!" I stuttered.

"A spider?"

"Yeah, I'm terrified of spiders." I mumbled.

"Damn, you're a handful." He criticized then grabbed his sandal and moved over to my bed and searched for the spider. I sat up and observed him.

SMACK!

"Disgusting little bastard." Kazama complained as he glared at the spider's oozing guts on his sandal. He paused for a moment then shook his head.

"Kazama?" I blinked.

"So, a little human girl would rather share a bed with a demon than a harmless spider?" He chuckled.

"What do you mean?" I asked, puzzled.

"You used to be afraid of me." He remarked, giving me a smirk. I sat up and smiled at him.

"And you used to hate me." I teased.

"Hn?" He tilted his head to the side.

"But now, we'reâ€¦!" I began then coughed uncontrollably.

"Enough. Get back in your bed." He ordered. I did as he instructed.

"Hey, Kazama, can I ask you something?"

"Hn, "

"When you said you would leave me behind in this dangerous place if I didn't get better, did you really mean that?" I inquired,

nervously.

"Why do you always assume the worst? Foolish woman, of course I would kill all the remaining furies before leaving you behind." He grumbled.

"You would?!" I gasped, my heart fluttered with glee.

"Go to sleep." He ordered.

A wave of delight relaxed all the tension in my body. As I drifted to sleep, my last thoughts were of him.

* * *

><p>"Kazama, you're right that I used to fear you and I even despised you at one point for always belittling me and bad mouthing the Shinsengumi but now, we're friends"

* * *

><p>I woke up alone feeling unrested and light headed. I wondered how the Shinsengumi or the Kouyou Chinbutai were and if they had seized Koufu Castle yet. I was confident they had already won the battle and grew agitated from not being there to witness their victory. Frustrated, I jerked the covers off myself and clenched my fists.<p>

"If I keep wasting my time here, I'm going to miss them again." I uttered, vexed. I sprang onto my feet then got dressed quickly and tied the sides of my hair back. I noticed Kazama's cracked sword was still on the floor and imagined he might have left to search for a new one.

"Kaori?" A muffled voice called out. I ventured to the door and slid it open.

"Hiroshi?" I gasped.

"Did you sleep well?" He inquired.

"Do you know where Kazama is?" I asked.

"He stepped out some time ago. I'm not really sure. Anyway, are you hungry?"

"I am a little." I nodded my head.

"We've prepared breakfast and there's something I want to ask you."

"What is it?"

"Just follow me." He gestured.

Hiroshi guided me into a dining room, filled with civilians. He instructed me to sit down and then prepared a tray of food as well as some medicine. I began devouring the meal realizing how hungry I was. When I was done I turned to Hiroshi who patiently waited for me to finish.

"What was it that you wanted to ask me?" I inquired, wiping my mouth.

"Is your warrior friend going to help us?" He huffed.

"Wellâ€¦" I turned my face away from him, unable to give him an answer.

"Just as I thought." He confirmed.

"What?" I blinked.

"He's a coward isn't he?"

"No! He's just, complicated?" I guessed, trying to come up with an excuse for Kazama's ways besides explaining that he's a demon who hates humans.

"What kind of warrior doesn't help people in need?" He argued. "You said before that those monsters are no match for him. So, if he's capable of defeating those beasts, he should!"

"I know but he doesn't reallyâ€¦um," I stuttered, biting my lip.

"You have to convince him to save us."

"What?!"

"You're the only one who can." Hiroshi glared into my brown eyes with fierce determination.

I glanced around the room at all the helpless people, trapped from living their lives because of the plague of merciless blood sucking ghouls that haunts their village. I found it nearly impossible to convince Kazama, the Lord of the West, to help a pack of weak humans who he probably viewed as trash. It was hard enough to get him to assist me and I was just one lowly human. Still, I couldn't bring myself to evade or ignore Hiroshi's plea.

"I'll do what I can." I promised. It was all I could give him.

"Thank you." Hiroshi sighed, relieved.

Suddenly I heard a thump right next to me and spun around seeing several young girls crowding to see me.

"Hey! You're that one girl who came here with the Great Warrior aren't you?" One of them chirped.

"Y-yeah? Don't worry. I'm going to try to convince him to help you all and-" I stuttered.

"Tell us, is he married? Does he have a wife?" One of them cut me off.

"He's so handsome! I could just eat him!" One of the girls giggled.

"Ahh!" I yelped, backing away from the crowd.

"Wait a second, maybe she is his girlfriend!" Another girl in the crowd suggested.

"I think you're right! I went to check on them this morning and I noticed she had gone into his room!" Our guide from yesterday blurted out. Before I could utter a single word, the crowd in front of me grew.

"Who are you two anyway?" One of the men asked, giving me a suspicious glare. I motioned to give him an answer but was cut off.

"I've told you guys already they're obviously runaway actors. The Great Warrior must have obtained his sword fighting skills from acting in plays so much."

"Hey! I thought we decided they're star crossed lovers running away from their families?"

"No way," Another villager debated. "It's clear he is her hired bodyguard or manservant."

"But if that's the case, why would the Great Warrior bring this little girl all the way out here?"

"Maybe he kidnapped her!" One of the girls stuttered.

"Everyone, quiet!" Hiroshi stressed. "You're all making her nervous."

"Well then, which is it?" One of the men asked. Everyone in the room became silent, all eyes were on me. Pressured, I quickly chose the most harmless answer.

"Umâ€¦let's go with actors." I shyly stated. Hiroshi banged his fist on the table, as all the cankerous villagers argued and debated amongst themselves.

"No way! I always thought you were beautiful but an actress too!" Hiroshi shouted, smiling at me. I shrugged, wishing I could take back what I said.

"Anyway, thank you for the meal." I remarked. Suddenly the whole room became silent. I glanced in the direction everyone was facing. Kazama stood in the entrance of the room with a new sword on his hip. He scanned the area until his eyes rested on me. I bolted out of my seat and dashed over to him.

"What are you doing out of the room?" He inquired, observing me.

"I just left to eat some food that's all and-" I blinked my eyes and blushed as Kazama placed his hand on my forehead. His face lowered into an aggravated expression.

"Why is your kind so feeble?" He grunted.

"What?" I mumbled.

"Tell me how you are feeling."

"I'm fine!" I stressed.

"You're in no position to lie to me." He growled.

"Kazama, I'm really okay." I whispered, losing my breath.

"Your fever has returned." Kazama let go of my face and grasped my upper arm, guiding me back into the room we slept in.

"I want you to stay here and rest until you are well again." He ordered.

"Kazama, I have a request." I asserted.

"Hn?" Kazama blinked.

"We're obligated to return the kindness these people have showed us. I think before we leave, you should." I paused briefly staring into his garnet eyes, already predicting his response. "I mean, we should help these people and get rid of all the remaining monstrous furies before we go, right?" The Demon Lord gave me a vindictive glare.

"I don't owe these pathetic humans anything." He growled.

"I had a feeling you would say something like that." I sighed.
"Still, what would it hurt to save them?"

"Demons aren't supposed to interfere with the human world. I thought I already explained this to you. We only got involved in this war because of the debt we owed the Satsuma Clan. I couldn't care less what happened to these humans."

"Are you saying you won't fight for them just because you're a demon? They don't even know that you're a demon." I whispered.

"That doesn't matter. I grow tired of this foolish conversation. It's pointless to explain the way of the oni to a mere human. Your kind is too conceited to understand such things." Kazama turned to leave the room.

"Kazama!" I called out. He halted and turned his head over his shoulder.

"Listen, I understand what you are but—" I took a deep breath as my chocolate eyes gazed into his garnet ones. "You don't have to be the bad guy!" I shouted. I could tell my words caught him off guard. He turned around and studied me for several seconds.

"I don't have to be the hero either." He finally replied.

"You're my—"

"I'm not your anything." He argued.

"I'm your friend, your ally." I cried.

"Stop it," He demanded. "You forget, I'm supposed to be your

enemy."

"No, I didn't forget. That just never mattered to me." I mumbled. Kazama's mouth opened slightly, looking puzzled. He stared at me for several seconds as if he was probing my conduct for some answer.

"Hn," He grunted, turning away from me. "Just get some rest."

"I can't; I'm ready to go to Koufu Castle! We're missing the battle as we speak!" I beseeched, as he advanced toward the door way, to exit the room. "Kazama please I'm okay! I want to witness their victory!"

Kazama let out a mocking laugh.

"You want to see their victory? Those idiots are suffering defeat right now." He snickered.

"That's impossible! Even so, this is the closest I've ever been to finally finding them so we have to leave." I pleaded.

"Forget it. I'm not going to let a sick woman enter a battle field." He chided.

"Wait you're not going toâ€|?"

"Relax, just focus on getting better." Kazama stepped out of the room and turned around to close the door.

"Believe me, I can handle myself! You have your sword now, we should go!"

"I'll decide when it's time to leave." Kazama growled, in a menacing tone. "Don't let me catch you out of this room." He demanded, shutting the door.

My body trembled from the thunder in his voice and I felt compelled to submit and obey the Demon Lord's command. Still I was tired with his attitude, for once; not because of the way he condemned the Shinsengumi but because of his tendency to erode my resolutions.

* * *

><p>"Kazama, when will you finally accept me?"

* * *

><p>I scanned the sheets for spiders and when I found none I tucked myself underneath the covers and allowed all my ill thoughts of Kazama to subside to reach enough tranquility to relax. After sometime I felt the medicine Hiroshi gave me earlier kick in, my fever even disappeared.<p>

Suddenly I heard footsteps hasting to the door. I sprang up, alert.

"Kaori?" Hiroshi's voice muffled through the door. "Can I come in?" He requested.

"Sure." I asserted. He lowered himself on his legs next to my bed.

"Did you manage to convince him to save us?" He asked, looking hopeful.

"I'm sorry but no." I bowed my head, feeling defeated.

"I see." His crystal blue eyes reflected great distress. He clenched his fists and gritted his teeth. "Well, it looks like we'll have to force him then."

"What?!" I squealed.

"I have an idea." He confirmed. "But I need you to cooperate."

"Me?" I blinked, baffled. He nodded his head.

"You recall when you first came into our village, yes? I mean when those fiends attacked you and Kazama slayed them."

I nodded my head.

"He was protecting me." I mumbled.

"It seems he only fights when you're in danger. So, if we use you as bait and those things attack youâ€¦"

"He'll be forced to slay them!" I asserted.

"That's exactly right. If you're in danger he'll have no choice but to kill those monsters in order to save you, it's perfect!" Hiroshi cheered. "Of course, I'll be keeping a close eye on you. I don't want you to get hurt."

"I don't know, those things are horrifying and I don't want to deceive him or anything." I uttered, recalling my nightmares.

"You have to, you owe us that much at least. It'll be fine, he's already killed some of them and I'll have your back." He reassured.

"I guess so," I uttered. "Do you even know where Kazama is right now?"

"He just stepped out. If you scream loudly when the fiends arrive I'm sure he'll rush to your rescue."

"Alright, I suppose it's the only way to save everyone." I mumbled, standing up and grabbing Kazama's cracked sword. "I'll keep this with me just in case, even though it's damaged it could still be useful."

"If we're going to do this, it has to be now. The clouds are covering the sun as we speak and it won't be overcast forever. Plus, I fear they may have learned where our current hideout is located."

"I'm ready when you are." I bravely confirmed advancing toward the door. Hiroshi leaped onto his feet and grabbed me.

"Hold on a second. There's one more thing I want to say." He remarked.

"What is it?"

"That Kazama guy, I get a dangerous vibe from him. Those hostile malevolent eyes of his look venomous. I don't think you should stay with him. Please, stay with me in my village after all those monsters are destroyed."

"I'm sorry but I can't do that."

"Kaori, listen, his incredible strength and other worldly features makes my skin crawl. I don't know how you could feel safe around him, it's like he's a devil!" He argued. It took me a moment to grasp what he was saying then I started to laugh; I couldn't help myself.

"Don't worry about me." I sputtered between breaths of laughter. "We're on a journey and have a destination we need to reach together. I want to be with him. I honestly don't know why but I feel I need him."

"He's bewitched you." Hiroshi gasped. I thought about what he said for a few seconds.

"You know what, perhaps. Still, bewitched or not, I have some place I need to be and someone I need to find. Besides, you don't give him enough credit. Behind those devilish eyes is an honorable man and truthfully he's not a bad guy at all." I spoke with such high esteemed reverence towards Kazama that Hiroshi gave up and let go of me.

"So, I'm guessing you too really aren't runaway actors?"

"Umâ€¦" I scratched the back of my head. "Sorry?"

"It's alright you were trying to hide your identities and intentions from strangers; I would have done the same thing. I hope you change your mind about that man. Let's do this!"

We both raced out of the room and faced the exit of the hideout. Hiroshi gathered some villagers to keep watch and assist us if something went wrong. Hiroshi then stood by the entrance.

"I'll be sure to rescue you if he fails, or doesn't show, okay?" Hiroshi offered. Anxious and fearful, I formed my resolve, remembering the security of Kazama's embrace.

"_I'm afraid one of those things outside is going to get me!" I sniffed. _

"_You know I won't let that happen." Kazama remarked._

"That's okay I know he will save me." I shook with fear but kept a brave mask on. I struggled to keep nightmares from pouring into my mind. I desperately wanted to hide under the covers from everyone but felt driven to return the kindness these people showed me and Kazama so instead I prepared to assist them in the only way I could.

Swallowing my fears, I stalked out the entrance and onto the vacant streets. Everything was completely silent, the air was still. I strolled down the road a little bit, scanning every alley way and building. My heart began to race. I placed my hand on my chest preventing it from bursting through my skin. I jerked my head back and forth and spun around numerous times, suspicious. I constantly reminded myself to stay focused, knowing the monstrous furies could attack any second. I glanced up at the clouds covering the piercing rays of the sun and waited for what seemed like hours but nothing happened. I grew puzzled and even a little bored.

"What's going on? It's so peaceful, as if all those creatures are gone." I mumbled to my impassive self then my heart stopped as I recalled Kazama's words.

"_Of course I would kill all the remaining furies before leaving you behind."_

"No! Did he reallyâ€|?!"

* * *

><p>To Be Continuedâ€|

16. Magical Boots

Author's note:

I may be absent for a while since college just started for me and I have to adjust to my new crazy schedule. I apologize if the next update is late but I'll be looking forward to your reviews to keep me going. My talented beta reader is 14Phantom!

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><p>"What's going on? It's so peaceful, as if all those creatures are gone." I mumbled to my impassive self then my heart stopped as I recalled Kazama's words.<p>

"_Of course I would kill all the remaining furies before leaving you behind."_

"No! Did he reallyâ€|?!"

* * *

><p>~Kingdom of Stars~

Chapter Sixteen: Magical Boots

* * *

><p>Cold sweat tickled my skin as my feet trampled across the street. Just a moment ago I was timid and anxious but once the anticipation of an uncertain ambush faded I grew vexed and afflicted once again by that demon.<p>

"Did he really leave me again?" I muttered, out of breath.

I knew that it was foolish to wander away from the hideout but I couldn't resist venturing a distance from Hiroshi and the villagers. I ached to resume my journey and the thought of that Demon Lord leaving me behind made the blood boil more riotously in my veins.

"Kazama!" I announced uproariously in the middle of the street, toward the clouds hovering over my head. "Don't you understand how important you are to me?! So what if I'm a human! Why can't you understand that demons and humans can work together?!"

I panted. My shoulders trembled and my eyes circled around me at nothing.

"I'm not even sick anymore!" I complained. "I thought I could trust you. I thought I could rely on you. Why do you have to be such a jerk!" I screeched. "I guess I'll just have to go to Koufu Castle by myself!"

I huffed then began marching down the street, out of the village.

"The Shinsengumi have retreated from Koufu Castle. They lost the battle. It was another humiliating defeat." A deep callous voice echoed near me causing a tingling sensation to rush through my body down to my bones.

I spun around on my heel searching for the source of that insensitive and ravishing voice.

"Kazama!" I gasped gazing up at him. He was standing on a roof top by me with his arms crossed. Those displeased radiant eyes shined a deep red. "How long have you been up there? Did you hear what I just said?" I yelped, regretfully. He didn't inflect any answer towards me as if he never heard my question.

"You don't have to explain yourself." He finally began. "I know you're not grateful to me for anything. You're a human after all and all humans are the same, ungrateful. It's in your blood to not have any respect for anything." He scorned.

"You don't understand. I thought you went to Koufu Castle without me." I explained. "I was worried you left me behind again and that's why I said those things."

"Humans do tend to say things they don't mean. They break promises and hurt the people closest to them. They simply can't be trusted."

"So, are you saying you're not mad at me?"

"That depends. Why are you out of your room? I believe I told you not to let me catch you out of there."

"But I'm all better now!"

"Did you leave to find me?"

"Um, yeah. As I said before, I was afraid you left me again, like

that time at the docks." I couldn't risk telling him about Hiroshi's plan, in fear for Hiroshi's own safety.

"Tell me somethingâ€¦"

"Huh?"

"Why is the thought of me leaving you behind, scare you so much?"

I bowed my head, searching for an answer I didn't even comprehend.

"I'm sorryâ€¦" I mumbled, unable to express my thoughts.

"You've become very dependent on me, little one." Kazama sighed. "You're like a child that can't do anything by herself." He asserted; his voice was so deep and mild that it had a tender touch on my skin causing me to feel numb.

I detested the idea of being dependent on him and jerked my head away from his sight, ashamed. I tightly gripped Kazama's broken sword in my trembling hands. I assumed that since none of the monster furies were attacking us that Kazama had really killed all of them.

A sudden soft breeze lifted my hair off my back and a large warm hand gently pressed against my forehead under my bangs. I twitched when I noticed Kazama had manifested right in front of me. My dark brown eyes widen as my cheeks turned red. I blinked at him, bashfully. He observed me with his devilish garnet eyes. Then he withdrew his hand from my skin and took a step back from me wearing a hollow expression.

"Um, Kazama, if you didn't go to Koufu Castle, where were you this whole time?" I asked, shyly.

"I wondered in the woods around it. Do you remember that boy who attacked us when we were traveling in the woods to get to Edo?"

"You mean that demon boy you fought who mentioned the oni slaying sword to us?" I inquired, he nodded his head.

"I observed him running in the woods from on top of a tree and chose to follow him."

"I recall him saying something about a new oni world. I remember first hearing about the water of life in those woods at that time." I reminisced. "What happened? Did he get away from you again?"

"I killed him. That was when I noticed the commander of the Shinsengumi retreating from the battlefield. It's no surprise those dogs lost."

"That can't be true! You're mistaken I bet they successfully seized the castle by now." I stuttered, wishfully. Kazama's eyebrows lowered.

"It's the truth."

"Then we have to go now! I can't miss them again!" I panicked. "I'll

say a quick farewell to the people here first and let them know about the furies."

"Hn?"

I glanced around the vacant streets wondering if the residents here knew they were finally safe from the monster furies then I peeked at Kazama behind me and let out a little laugh.

"Kazama, you're not the evil demon that you think you are." I teased.

"What do you mean?"

"You killed all the furies didn't you? So, these people won't have to live in fear anymore."

"I didn't kill them."

"What?! Then where are they? Why aren't they attacking us?"

"Perhaps they have enough sanity to fear me." He blustered with arrogance.

I twirled around and inspected the area. Suddenly, I recalled Hiroshi's formidable words.

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><p>"Alright, I suppose it's the only way to save everyone." I mumbled, standing up and grabbing Kazama's cracked sword. "I'll keep this with me just in case, even though it's damaged it could still be useful."

"If we're going to do this, it has to be now. The clouds are covering the sun as we speak and it won't be overcast forever. Plus, I fear they may have learned where our current hideout is located."

"I'm ready when you are." I bravely confirmedâ€|

* * *

><p>"Kazama! They're not attacking us because they must be attacking the hideout! We have to do something or they'll all be killed!" I stressed then turned from him and dashed down the street and rounded a few blocks to where the hideout was located. As I passed one of the buildings a man was thrown through a paper wall and landed right by my feet. .<p>

"They just came out of nowhere!" The man whined in agony, confirming my suspicion.

"Everyone! Get outside now! We have to retreat to a safer location!" I heard Hiroshi giving orders and observed dozens of people rushing out of the hideout. Hiroshi dashed out with them and paused once he spotted me.

"Kaori! Where is Kazama?" He asked.

An animalistic groan morphed from inside the hideout and suddenly a black cloud busted out of the walls and into the street on all fours. People panicked and screamed as the beast began devouring easy targets. Hiroshi stood a distance away from me.

"I don't understand. Do you want to find that dog in the Shinsengumi or not? You couldn't possibly catch up with them now, foolish girl." Kazama grunted behind me.

I looked into Kazama's eyes; his head instantly jerked towards Hiroshi. When I turned around to glance back at Hiroshi I noticed one of the furies leaped from off a rooftop and crash landed between us. The creature had flesh caught between its razor sharp teeth. It started to lurch toward me. Kazama placed his hand on his sword and glared at the creature. Hiroshi immediately hurled a rock through the air that smacked the back of the monster's head. The hunched beast lifted itself up on its hind legs and circled around to face Hiroshi, a bloody drool splattered around on the dirt. Kazama took his hand off his sword.

"Kazama!" Don't just stand there, help him!" I begged. He stared at the horrified Hiroshi expressionless. I knew he wasn't going to budge. I ground my teeth in anger. Hiroshi backed away from the advancing creature, unarmed.

"Kazama you're right!" I asserted.

"I'm right?" He questioned, in an irritated tone.

"I have become very dependent on you and that has to change!" I clutched Kazama's old cracked sword in my hand and ripped off the sheath, tossing it on the dirt. Acting without thought I gripped both my hands on the handle and lifted the sword over my head and charged toward the creature. With my eyes closed I thrust the sword down on the creature's back with as much power and momentum as I could muster.

"Kaori!" I heard Hiroshi screech my name.

Crrracck

I peeked my eyes open and saw hundreds of scattering shiver pieces, flying in front of my face and clanking onto the ground, from the impact on the creature's impenetrable skin. All that remained of the sword was an inch of steel, still connected to the handle.

"Run!" Hiroshi pleaded.

The creature thrashed its arm back at me. I was blown down by a turbulent twister of wind. When I landed on the ground I saw Kazama between me and the monster gripping its wrist and thus prevented it from hitting me. Kazama twisted its arm back in one lurching motion. I could hear the crackling of broken bones. The creature let out an ear-splitting cry. Kazama let go of its arm and pulled his sword out of its sheath and stabbed the creature.

"Everyone, look! It's the Great Warrior!" A villager cheered. A large crowd encircled around us as they tried to get close to Kazama for protection.

Another fury attracted by the scent of fresh blood, bolted towards Kazama in the air and Kazama elegantly swung his sword upward, gutting the creature as it leaped over his head.

"I never thoughtâ€¦!" Kazama began as he spun around in a dance of dexterous swordsmanship, slashing the furies as they gathered around the villagers beside him. "I would waste so much time on a mere human." He grunted, briefly checking on me then continued the fight.

Once Kazama emerged victorious over the slaughtered furies the villagers cheered and praised him.

"We're saved!"

"Thank you so much Great Warrior Kazama!"

"We're forever in your debt Great Warrior!"

Even though Kazama didn't pay any attention to the villagers, the Demon Lord couldn't hide the fact that he just saved a bunch of humans. Their praises gave me a welcoming feeling unlike the people Kazama and I encountered on the ship who forced us to leave on a life boat. If the people here knew he was actually a devil would they have cheered cries of hate instead of praise? I guessed none of that mattered as long as peace was returned to their homes.

Kazama whipped the blood off his sword before sheathing it and walked passed me. I gave him a smile that he ignored. The villagers hugged one another and some even pranced around gleefully in the streets. Kazama would later be known as the Great Warrior who saved this village in epic tales and folklore.

* * *

><p>You see Kazama, you're really not the bad guy at all.

* * *

><p>Just as I was about to trot joyfully behind Kazama Hiroshi dashed towards me.<p>

"Hey, Kaori." He called out.

"Hiroshi?"

"Are you leaving now?" He asked.

"Yeah, I have to resume my journey. Please take care."

"For saving us, you two will be welcomed as hero's in this village from now on!" One of the villagers interrupted.

"Kaori, are you sure you won't stay?" Hiroshi inquired, hopefully.

"I have to go. Maybe one day I'll come back and visit." I smiled at him.

"I'd love that! Just you though."

"What do you mean? You don't want Kazama to visit to?"

"He saved us. He's brave and strong I'd give him that but there's no need for him to come back here when we're free from those monsters. Besides I think there's something different about him that I just don't trust. Kaori, please be careful when you're with this guy."

"Alright." I confirmed. "Until we meet again, Hiroshi." I waved to him as I started to catch up with Kazama.

"Until then, Kaori!" Hiroshi hollered.

Even as Kazama and I exited the village we could just barely hear the resident's partying and reciting Kazama's name with adoration.

It felt good to resume my journey to Koufu Castle. Once I hopped beside Kazama he halted and glanced down at me.

"There's no need for you to risk going to Koufu Castle. It's too late. The Shinsengumi were defeated." He remarked.

"I still have to go to see for myself. There is a chance they still could be there." I argued.

"It's foolish. Like I said before, they've retreated."

"They haven't lost this battle. You're probably just mistaken." I babbled, in disbelief. "No, they can't lose again!"

Kazama grinned, sadistically.

"Your pitiful faith in those weak humans is hilarious to me." He snickered.

"I don't care if you find that funny. I said I'm going to Koufu Castle and I always keep my word. I must go no matter how dangerous it is."

"Hn." He scowled then continued to tread on the path.

We traveled silently for several minutes. He seemed really hostile and distant towards me. I wondered if saving those humans hurt his pride as a demon. As a child I was always taught that demons were despicable evil creatures that sought the ruin and devastation of mankind.

* * *

><p>Lost in thought while treading on the path to Koufu Castle, I recalled an old tale about an Oni that frightened me when I was a child. It was called The Oni and the Three Children. A poor mother abandoned her three sons in the woods. A great Oni who lived in the woods picked up on the lost boys' human sent and hungered for them. The large Oni hunted the three children in order to devour their flesh until he decided to rest on the side of a road. While the Oni was asleep the boys were able to steal his magical boots that enabled the Oni to travel incredibly fast. In the end the boys used the boots to escape the dangerous woods and were all reunited with

their mother where they lived happily ever after.

* * *

><p>Even though that story had a good ending I dreadfully feared the power and malice of the giant Oni lurking in the woods, hungry for the flesh of children. Kazama was an Oni; a very powerful one. There I was traveling in the woods on a road by the Demon Lord's side. The same demon who saved my life more than once and the lives of all the humans in that village. I knew that demons were supposed to be dangerous entities feared by mankind but I could no longer view Kazama in that grim way. I only wished that Kazama would change his perspective of humans and see that great things could be accomplished when we work together.<p>

"Hey, Kazama?" I mumbled.

"Hn."

"Did you find out why that boy was there before you killed him?"

"His name is Kaoru and he was after Chizuru who was retreating with the Shinsengumi."

"What?! Is she okay?"

"Yeah." Kazama grumbled then paused in his tracks and stared at the sky. "I don't understand why she follows those weak humans."

"Maybe she follows them for the same reason why I follow you." I chirped. Kazama turned slightly towards me.

"Hn, and why do you follow me, human girl?"

"Because, you're my friend and Iâ€|um," I stuttered, rubbing the back of my head.

"You, what?" Kazama grunted. Suddenly I felt tongue tied and my cheeks became warm. Kazama impatiently faced me. "Why are you always so bashful?" He complained.

"I like you Kazama!" I blurted out then smacked my lips.

"Huh?" Kazama blinked, a little taken back from my sudden response.

"No! I mean I admire you and your strength." I began, blushing. "I want to assist you in any way I can to return all the favors you have done for me. I think that perhaps Chizuru feels the same way for the people she cares about in the Shinsengumi. Demon or human, it doesn't matter! When people are torn apart by tragedy, war, and sadness, feelings and friendships mean everything. Humans especially seek companionship and guidance when everything around them is strife."

"Seeking comfort or friendship with humans is foolish. I know they will betray her eventually. All humans want is money and power, they long to indulge themselves." He mocked.

"For some humans that is true but not the Shinsengumi. They don't care about money or power; all they want to do is serve their country and fight to protect what they believe in."

"War is an alleged reason for humans to destroy what others have done. Plundering wealth is their ultimate goal."

"You always talk about money like it's such a bad thing!" I chided, unable to control my emotions. "Let me ask you have you ever felt pain from hunger? Have you ever suffered in the cold at night? The only way to survive in this merciless world is to have money so you can't condemn humans that fight for it as long as it isn't for selfish reasons."

"You have to be one of the densest humans I've ever encountered. I won't argue with you. You've missed the point. Foolish human."

"Arrogant demon!" I screeched. His crimson eyes widened. "Why can't you understand that humans and demons can cooperate and help each other?"

"Humans and demons have tried to cooperate in the past. In the end humans just use the Oni to gain power like how you used me for your own protection and to save that village. That is why you foolishly charged into battle with my broken sword, is it not?"

"Why would that matter? Are you upset that you had to save me?"

"What are you trying to say to me?"

"Kazama, what you did was a good thing. There is nothing wrong with saving lives and I thank you for saving mine and all the villagers."

"You gave me no other choice." He growled, his red eyes flashed malice into mine.

"I charged into battle not because I wanted you to rescue me or force you to fight the furies. I did it to protect Hiroshi, who has been nothing but kind to me since we arrived at the village. I'm surprised that you jumped in and actually destroyed all those monsters."

"Of course I did. Your life was in danger." He criticized.

"You were worried about me?" I gasped, placing my hand on my heart.

"I don't approve of what you did. It was reckless and stupid. Don't you understand how weak you are?"

"I'm not weak!" I scowled.

"You're human. It's natural for you to be weak." He disputed.

"Wellâ€¦" I stuttered. "I don't need your protection! I can take care of myself!" I pouted, frustrated.

"Hn," He chuckled. "Silly little thing, you wouldn't even last a day without me." The demon sneered.

I clenched my fist.

"I'm not little and I'm stronger than you think!"

"Well then, should we go our separate ways?" He inquired. I felt my heart skip a beat. "What's the matter? Afraid to be alone, weak human? I thought you said you can take care of yourself." He taunted, giving me a smirk.

"Fine!" I shouted impulsively. Then reluctantly spun around and marched into the woods to find another path.

* * *

><p>What are you doing?! Go back to him! He's only toying with you! You still need him!

* * *

><p>I argued with myself in my head as my vision began to blur. After taking several steps in no particular direction I grimaced and kicked a nearby tree.<p>

"You're such a jerk!" I sniffed then huffed onto a path.

Several minutes passed as I carelessly wandered in the direction of the battle field. I heard birds chirping in the sky followed by the sound of leaves blowing in the wind and crackling in the ground.

"Who's there?!" I shouted in fear. When I heard no reply I cautiously investigated the area around me. Upon finding nothing I turned in the direction of the wind. "If you're following me you're going to be in trouble!" I whimpered loudly as my body began to tremble.

Sling

The sound of sliding metal echoed in my ears.

"Kazama?" I squeaked.

"I'm surprised you were able to tell you were being followed. Humans have such a strong scent." Remarked an unfamiliar voice.

A man emerged from behind a tree and advanced toward me with a blood stained sword in his hand.

"W-what do you want?" I wined, my heart began to race.

"I'm surprised to see a little girl all alone; lost in the woods. Did someone abandon you?"

"Stay away!" I begged, hysterically.

He charged at me and before I could turn around and run he hurled his sword in my direction. I threw my body to the side and collapsed in

the dirt, just barely missing his blade which stabbed into a tree. My right hand hit a rock and scrapped my skin. As my wound slowly began to bleed, the man's hair turned white and his eyes, a devilish red.

"Now you're going to see what dangers lurk in these woods. I'm going to devour you, Child!" He growled.

I knew there was no way I could out run him. I crawled onto my back, feeling as helpless as a small abandoned child, lost alone in the woods.

"Miserable fake." Grunted a deep voice.

Slash!

I staggered to my feet and saw Kazama slicing through the furies heart from behind. The fury thumped onto the ground as Kazama pulled back his sword and returned it to its sheath.

"I thought you could handle things on your own." He teased, crossing his arms.

"And I thought we were going our separate ways." I snapped, wiping dirt off my clothes.

"Hn, looks to me like I was right." He taunted. I stood up frowning at him.

"I thank you for saving me." I politely bowed then jerked up. "You knew this would happen didn't you?" I protested. He advanced toward me. "You were following me!" I accused.

"And just what sort of trouble am I going to be in now?" He chuckled. I recalled saying that moments ago and glared at his playful grin.

"Hn?" He smirked.

"Stop it." I pouted.

"A little human thinks she can cause me trouble? How cute." He grumbled. His eyes landed on my injured hand. I backed away from him.

"I'm okay and I don't need any help from you." I stuttered, trying to sound tough.

"Human wounds take a long time to heal, you can't ignore them."

"I'm fine." I grumbled then touched the scrape and cringed.

"Forget it." He demanded. "Let me take a look." In a split second my injured hand was in his. I gasped in shock as my cheeks turned red from his unexpected gentle touch.

"Kaê|zama?" I lost my breath. His large hand let go of mine when he was done with his observation.

"The bleeding has stopped. You'll be okay." He confirmed, looking

into my eyes.

"Alright, you can go now." I mumbled, trying to hide my blushing face, by averting my gaze from his.

"Hn?"

"I'm fine." I affirmed. "Now go away." I hesitantly ordered, in a low voice.

"I find it hard to understand your mumbling." Kazama objected.

"Go away." I directed, regretfully.

"Go? Where?" He questioned, closing the gap between us. I peeked at his face, shyly. He gazed into my watery eyes. I tried to give him a glare but was still fighting tears from being attacked. So all I could manage was a pout. I felt pathetic, being saved by him again but at the same time relieved to be reunited with my demon friend.

"Tsk, your eyes are too easy to read, if you want me to stay with you, just say so." He teased.

"Fine!" I whispered, in defeat and looked down; my bangs hid my face from his garnet eyes. "Please stay with me."

"What was that?" He grabbed my chin and lifted my face up toward his. "If you want something from me don't speak at the ground. I want to see your eyes." He lectured.

"I said fine." I mumbled under my breath.

"Should I go?" He remarked, dissatisfied then let go of my chin.

"No!" I panicked, grabbing his arm. "I told you to stay."

"You mumbled." He chastised.

"Just stay with me." I pleaded.

"Now you want me to stay with you? Indecisive woman."

"Kazama, I'm sorry about before." I muttered.

"It is harder for humans to control their emotions." He asserted. I smiled at him and he gave me his usual blank look then turned his back to me. "Come." He ordered.

"Right!" I cheered and gleefully followed him on the path to Koufu Castle.

I started to question why I used to fear demons so much as a child when I never even encountered one. Thinking back, what happened to me moments ago was almost like what occurred in that horrific fable. Though what happened wasn't exactly like the story itself, I at least enjoyed a happy ending. I guess in my fairy tale Kazama was my magical boots, that enabled me to escape my fate of being eaten.

In just a short while we were both out of the woods. My eyes landed on an astonishing site.

"Kazama! Look!" I gasped, pointing at the top of the towering structure.

"Koufu Castle." He grunted. "We'll have to sneak our way in. I doubt I'll be able to just take the sword freely."

I swallowed hard.

"Kazama, did the Shinsengumi really lose this battle?" My lips quivered as I spoke.

Kazama stared at me for a moment then treaded over a small hill and paused at the top of it. I dreadfully followed. Something throbbed throughout my body, warning me not to take a single step further but I unreasonably ignored it.

There were craters throughout the land. The grass was littered with fresh corpses, and painted red by their blood. The tears I held in before were racing uncontrollably out of my eyes as I grieved over the loss of so many lives. It was the most horrendous sight. A chilling wind whistled around my face and with it, the smell of death.

I expected Kazama to cruelly belittle me and the Shinsengumi since he was right about their inevitable defeat but instead he kept his attention silently on his destination. The troubles that awaited us at the large and intimidating Koufu Castle were obscure and perilous. For better or worse, I made the decision to stay with Kazama and there was no turning back. I had to make sure none of the Shinsengumi members were left and if so my next step after helping Kazama obtain the Oni slaying sword would be figuring out where the Shinsengumi retreated to and planning a way to get there.

Without me realizing it Kazama returned to the path that led directly to the castle. I slowly staggered back to the path.

"Stay close to me." He instructed from a short distance ahead.

"Why?" I uttered, catching up with him. He placed his hand on his sword and studied the magnificent and enigmatic structure before us.

"So that I can protect you."

* * *

><p>To Be Continuedâ€|

17. The Obsidian Dragon

Author's note:

WooHoo! FINALLY I WAS ABLE TO UPDATE THIS THING!

**So sorry for the late update everyone but rest assured, I haven't

dis-continued this fic. I fully intend to complete it someday, one update at a time. I just got so behind on all my college work and then there's living situations I had to deal with plus I just got two adorable guinea pigs (one of them is fuzzy). Too many distractions! Thankfully it's my spring break so I was finally able to continue this story which I hope all of you are still willing to read. I've re-read your reviews on my last chapter a dozen times to remind me it's worth continuing so please keep up the support! It really saves this story. Also forgive me if there's mistakes in this chapter since it's been so long I'm not as sharp on catching things.

**

WhiteSaille: Thanks so much for your review. I loved reading yours since the pacing is something that I sometimes struggle with because I really want it to progress in the right way. Also the alternate Kazama route is actually what I was going for, partly, so it's neat that you caught that :)

Ainhoa11: Actually the oni tale, told in the pervious chapter, is in fact traditional Japanese folklore. I of course put the tale into my own words but the story itself I got out of a book titled **Folktales of Japan**** there's actually a lot more depth to the story but I didn't want to go into too much detail when I had Kaori recall it since it just wasn't all relevant to what was going on in the last chapter. **

Ayame: Nice to hear from you again I'm so glad my story was one of your favorites before. I hope you're still willing to read it!

Guest/Unknown: Thanks for the support!

mariko85: I had a fun time coming up with that part when Kazama teased her; there's more of that to come :)

crazyquilt: I'm glad to hear you think the characters are cute^^ and so sorry for the late update!

**Zhera: First off, I just love getting reviews from you; makes my day every time. I really appreciate the fact that you've been watching out for this story and I feel terrible that I haven't been able to update frequently. I didn't mean to make you wait so long but I am thrilled that you want me to continue it. I hope my chapters to come can live up to your expectations! **

**14Phantom: BEST BETA READER EVER! **

As always, I look forward to hearing from all of my readers and I hope you all will continue to read and support this fic so we can see it finished someday!

* * *

><p>The troubles that awaited us at the large and intimidating Koufu Castle were obscure and perilous. For better or worse, I made the decision to stay with kazama and there was no turning back. I had to make sure none of the Shinsengumi members were left and if so my next step after helping Kazama obtain the Oni slaying sword would be figuring out where the Shinsengumi retreated to and planning a way to get there.<p>

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"So that I can protect you."

* * *

><p>~Kingdom of Stars~

Chapter Seventeen: The Obsidian Dragon

* * *

><p>I treaded lightly behind Kazama, feeling disillusioned from the crushed Kouyou Chinbutai forces; dead and still before us.<p>

What would it take for these glorious men, a part of the Shinsengumi, to taste the sweetest scent of victory? Or, is it truly the fate of these fleeting samurai to be written down as the losers in history and what honor could possibly lie before the defeated?

I heard the demon lord gripe, in disgust, over the scourge of rotting flesh and I was left to imagine what degree of calamity the leaders of the Kouyou Chinbutai , had actually endured.

Kazama and I kept our distance from live soldiers left, cleaning up the battle field.

"Soâ€|they really lost." I found myself whisper, unintentionally.

"Of course they did." Kazama curtly grunted. "Don't look so surprised. I've already told you this would happen. Now do you see how foolish it is not to listen to me, child?"

I tried my best to ignore him and turned my gaze away from his red eyes as he glanced over his shoulder for a response. I clenched my fists and gritted my teeth which seemed to satisfy him enough as he continue forward with his back facing me. I wasn't interested in anything he had to say at that moment, for I knew him well enough to guess what his thoughts were. Besides, Kazama didn't even think I would ever find the man I was searching for. He had no faith in the brave men of the Shinsengumi. I doubted it would surprise him if the man I searched for was dead in this field. But, what if he was here? I began twirling around the path scanning every corpse we passed for a glimpse of his presence.

"Pleaseâ€|please." I begged, fearful that my eyes would catch his corpse, making my hopes and dreams crumble into the soil beneath my feet. Kazama, curiously titled his head towards me and narrowed his eyes, puzzled by my aimless prancing. I grew curious over a body beneath some bushes and dashed over to it. I felt my heart jump in my

chest when I realized it was nothing then bolted towards another body. Kazama paused, crossed his arms and studied me like I had gone insane. Just when he was about to complain over my nonsensical behavior I halted in my tracks at the sight of a dead man beneath a large tree.

"What are you doing?" Kazama began.

"It can't be!"

"Hn?"

"This!"

"What are you babbling about?" Kazama grumbled, annoyed as he advanced toward me; I remained still. "Hey."

"I think that's!" I screeched. "The man I'm searching for!"

"!?"

I hurled over to the tree and plummeted to my knees before the dead man. Half of the dead man's body was covered in blood.

"No!" I gasped while desperately clinging to the corpse's hand until I caught a glimpse of his face then paused.

"Hey." Kazama, called out eagerly from behind me as I began pulling myself together.

"Hn?" I sniffed, realizing how flustered I was and glanced up at him. His callous expression grew tender once a tear blinked out of my eye, as if it had the ability to curve the demon's unshakeable and cold insensitivity.

Kazama glanced down at my hand then focused his gaze over the demolished field, polluted and scarred by the wreckage of battle.

"Humans always destroy other humans." He asserted. "There are those who desert the battlefield, in pure cowardice, to protect their own lives. Some even betray their comrades or the closest people to them without any respect or loyalty. Honor is becoming a rarity in our changing world." Kazama paused to glance down at the dead man under the tree. "But this one died in battle, with honor."

"Yes, he did." I mumbled faintly while letting go of the limp lifeless hand.

"What are you planning to do now?"

"Keep searching."

"Hn?" Kazama blinked, puzzled.

"I was mistaken." I confirm, slowly rising to my feet. "This man isn't the one I've been searching for. He just resembles him."

"How could you be mistaken over something like this?" Kazama growled,

with sudden indignation.

"I haven't seen him for a long time." I argued.

"Then how do you know for sure this isn't him." Irritated, he gestured over to the dead man under the large tree.

"His uniform; he's just an ordinary soldier." I explained. "The man I search for holds a high rank in the Shinsengumi."

Kazama's garnet eyes instantly flickered. His vexed expression became relaxed and focused, showing a sudden yet looming interest.

"So, he's one of the captains or commanders?"

"Yeah."

"Interesting..." Kazama grumbled, with a smirk. I marched hastily past him, determined to get off the battlefield as soon as possible. I yearned to finish my business at Koufu and track the Kouyou Chinbutai's exact whereabouts. I could hear Kazama following close behind me.

"You should understand by now that your friends have no chance of winning." He impolitely provoked. I tried my best not to let his cold words phase me. "Great changes are coming to this country, not everyone will survive these changes. The Bakufu is finished. Even though the world is changing, humans will always be humans. More wars are bound to happen. The cycle continues and it's all about plundering wealth. Do you understand?"

Kazama paused for a moment, waiting. I channeled him out, focusing only on my determination to reach my destination. I heard him grunt, displeased.

"What's wrong?" He chastised. "Are you worried about that human?" He mocked. I stomped my foot on the ground, frustrated and spun around to face him.

"You think he's dead don't you?" I asserted.

"So, what if I do?" He teased, satisfied with my reaction. I relinquished the rage in my heart from the hostile sensation his words created, to proclaim my resolve.

"Even so, I'll keep searching. I will find him." My fists clenched as I glared into those piercing demonic eyes. "I don't like to imagine it but if he did die, I would still want to know what became of him." I admitted.

Kazama gave me a blank stare for a moment then grinned, both charmed and mockingly.

"I would also like to see for myself." He began. "I've grown curious about this person. You said he's of high rank. So, what is he? One of the captains?"

"Wait, you're interested?" I squeaked, stunned. "But, why? He's just another stupid human to you."

"Hmph, naturally." He gloated. "But besides thatâ€¦" He advanced towards me. "I wouldn't mind hearing more about this pursuit of yours."

We stared at one another for several long, pending seconds.

"Well?" He urged after sometime.

"Iâ€¦we shouldn't waste our time on this. Besides you'll only make fun of him and call him weak and foolish despite how hard he's fought."

"He is weak and foolish."

"Hey!"

"Hn?"

"That's it I'm not telling you a thing! What's the point, if he's already dead, right?"

"Hn, suit yourself but I'll find out who he is one way or another." Kazama stated as he stepped beside me. He paused for a moment in his tracks and looked down into my eyes. I felt nervous suddenly, unable to read his otherworldly garnet gaze. "You really shouldn't stay with me, little one." He remarked as he placed his hand briefly on the top of my head, sending shivers under my skin.

"Huh!?" I yelped. "Why do you say that?" Kazama lifted his hand from my head, a few strands of my hair loosely tangled between his fingers, and flowed in his hand as he let go. The sting of his touch remained even after my hair fell back into place. He took his gaze from me and advanced.

"I'm his enemy. You're betraying the very person you search for."

"You're only after one man in the Shinsengumi and since you're a demon I don't really consider you apart of this human war." I argued, though Kazama didn't seem to be paying attention to what I was saying as he remained fixated on the colossal Koufu Castle. "I'm assisting the man who saved my life multiple times in the past." I declared, putting my hand on my heart. "Andâ€¦the man who gave me comfort just now."

"Comfort?" The demon grumbled, finally acknowledging my words.

"What you said about that dead man who I thought was the person I was looking for, means a lot to me. For a moment I almost accepted the thought of him dying in battle if it gave him honor." I sincerely uttered, with gratitude. Kazama glanced slightly over his shoulder, listening. "You made it sound like his death wasn't wasted and that the dream the Shinsengumi chase, to become true samurai, could become a reality, even if they lost this war or their very lives. Soâ€¦thank you, for saying that he died with honor. Thank you, Kazama."

"Hmphâ€¦" The demon lord grunted, in disapproval. "Reality." He exhaled, and kept his unreadable thoughts to himself as we approached

our destination.

I continued following him quietly, like before. Soon, Koufu Castle towered over us causing my body to shake though I was barely aware of the growing tribulation, inside myself.

Just when we arrived a short distance from the entrance Kazama rotated our paths, venturing away from the large gates that we needed to go through. I didn't question his motives at first and treaded faithfully behind him as he made his way through some bushes and trees around the gates of the castle.

"Umâ€|Kazama." I whispered. "What are we doing?"

"We're not making our presence known here."

"What? But aren't the people who seized this castle your allies."

"Friend or foe, humans reside in that castle. They want to keep the powerful Douji-giri Yasutsuna to themselves and out of the hands of demons."

"Why not just charge in and take it." I bluntly stated. He looked at me like I was a total idiot.

"I can't cause trouble for my allies. My clan doesn't need any more quarrels with humans. We already had a debt to pay to Satsuma. I will sneak in, and take the sword."

"You have to steal it?"

"Of course; what other way is there? It's a powerful demonic weapon that doesn't belong in the hands of humans."

"How are we going to sneak in?"

"There is a passage way behind the castle that'll lead directly to the catacombs, where the sword is being kept."

"Do you think it'll be easy to take?"

Kazama nodded his head.

"Should I wait here for you?" I inquired, glancing around us. Kazama scanned the area and noticed a small group of guards walking and chatting close by then he glanced down at me and sighed.

"If I leave you here, you'll only foolishly get caught by guards."

"I can hide." I debated.

"That's too risky. Let's go."

I decided not to argue with him as we made our way around the back of the castle. When we reached the back yard he assisted me over the gate surrounding the castle and immediately, we concealed ourselves in some bushes. Alert, Kazama silently observed the area and noticed a few guards around a doorway.

"This is where we enter right?" I whispered, keeping my voice down.

"You keep quiet." He harshly replied before unsheathing his sword. I wanted to ask him what he was up to but was stricken to listen to his command. "Wait here." He ordered.

"Kay," I squeaked, feeling nervous to be separated from him.

In a blink of an eye Kazama vanished. I suddenly heard a few groans and grunts and crawled out of the bushes to see a few guards knocked out in the saplings beside the gates.

I remained still for a moment then hopped onto my feet and met him once he took care of all the guards in our way. I approached the back entrance cautiously unlike Kazama who showed no hesitation as we entered the foreboding Koufu castle.

We wandered silently in a long hallway with a few rooms on the sides. I tried to stay as focused as I could. Then Kazama halted abruptly. I blinked at him. He spun around and grabbed my arm and forced me into a vacant room and slid the door shut. He let go of my arm and leaned against a wall to listen. Exasperated, I faced him.

"Hey! What was-" I began to mumble but before I could take another breath to speak he gripped my arm tightly and twirled me around so that my back fell into his chest then he thrust his strong hand on my mouth and pressed it into my jaw to keep me quiet. I felt tears form in my eyes from the pressure.

"Did you hear something?" An unfamiliar voice muffled from outside the room along with clanking footsteps.

"No, did you?" Another unfamiliar voice replied.

"Yeah, I believe I heard a voice over there."

I peeked at Kazama in shock realizing the reason why he threw us in that room. I panicked, worried that I had just blown our cover.

"Hn." I grunted, uncomfortably as Kazama's fingers clawed into my cheek, reminding me to stay quiet. In response to the pain I placed my cold hand on his. "Hnnn," I whined, unable to take the pain as it became difficult to inhale. I was constrained to Kazama's body so firmly I could feel his breath.

The footsteps and voices from outside became louder as the guards crept closer to the door. My hands began to sweat from my nerves. I found myself whimpering out of fear of us being noticed. What would Kazama do to me if we were caught because of my actions? The last thing I wanted to do was cause him more trouble than I was worth. Kazama's response to my whimpering was pressing his hand harder on my face which only made it more difficult to silence myself. I slid my hand down onto his wrist and squeezed it tightly. To my surprise his grip loosened a bit. Then I felt something soft and warm caress my ear.

"It's alright." He murmured, nimbly in a low, soothing voice. I felt my

stiff body become lethargic just by the alluring ring that vibrated in my ear. The magnetic feel of him became mesmerizing; so much so, that for a moment I forgot all my fears and worries. I nodded my head in acknowledgment. Once the footsteps and voices grew faint he let go of me and opened the door.

"Kazama, I'm so sor-" I began to mumble. Kazama spitefully thrashed his crimson gaze in my direction, giving me an unwelcoming glare. I instantly covered my mouth, apologetically. We said nothing to each other as we mutely crept down the hallway to the entrance of the catacombs.

An eerie sensation engulfed me as soon as my feet creaked onto the last few steps on the stairway descending inside the underground passageways of Koufu Castle. We rounded a short labyrinth of hallways filled with dust. The entire time my inner instincts screamed at me to run and get out of there. Despite listening to what I knew was the safe choice, I pressed on faithfully beside Kazama. I longed to be useful to him. There had to be some way a small human could be of use to the Demon Lord. I had the urge to prove myself; to show him the unwavering strength that humans can possess. Perhaps then, he would learn to acknowledge the strength and dedication of the men in the Shinsengumi. The way they lived their lives was with pure honor and loyalty. I wanted to live the same way.

The dim lighting, from candles on the walls, casted shadows around Kazama's tall figure. To my surprised, there was no sign of any guards or anyone in general. Could we have been the only ones down there? I was certain that the invaluable oni-slaying sword wouldn't just be left unguarded. But who or what could be keeping the sword out of the reach of demons? I wanted to express these thoughts to Kazama but couldn't get over this threatening feeling that something venomous and powerful would hurl at us at any given moment. It was as if some perilous presence close by was watching, waitingâ€¦lurking.

Cautiously, we found the end of the labyrinth. A large decorated red door with an obsidian design of a fierce and malicious dragon, stood before us. I knew that our destination, the Douji-giri Yasutsuna, was behind this door. Blood pumped hard out of my heart and the tips of my fingers tingled. Ill notions swept my thoughts as I became aware of the impending danger. Was there an enemy that could over power Kazama, the Demon Lord? We've gone through so many trials and faced so many adversaries; it was difficult to believe that such a foe could exist. But, despite all we've endured, I had a gut wrenching feeling that whatever lurked beyond this door posed something far more menacing and far more treacherous.

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><p>To Be Continuedâ€¦

**Thanks for reading! I know it's been awhile but I hope to update more frequently if I can after spring break is over but until then I'll be looking forward to your reviews! Until next time! **

End
file.